A YEAR WITH THE BIRDS

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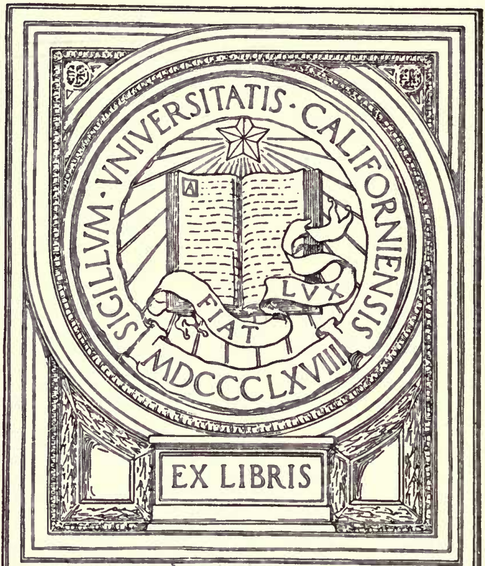

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A YEAR WITH THE BIRDS.

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By WILSON FLAGG,

AUTHOR OF "A YEAR AMONG THE TREES."—"HALCYON DAYS."—ETC.

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MUSIC OF BIRDS.

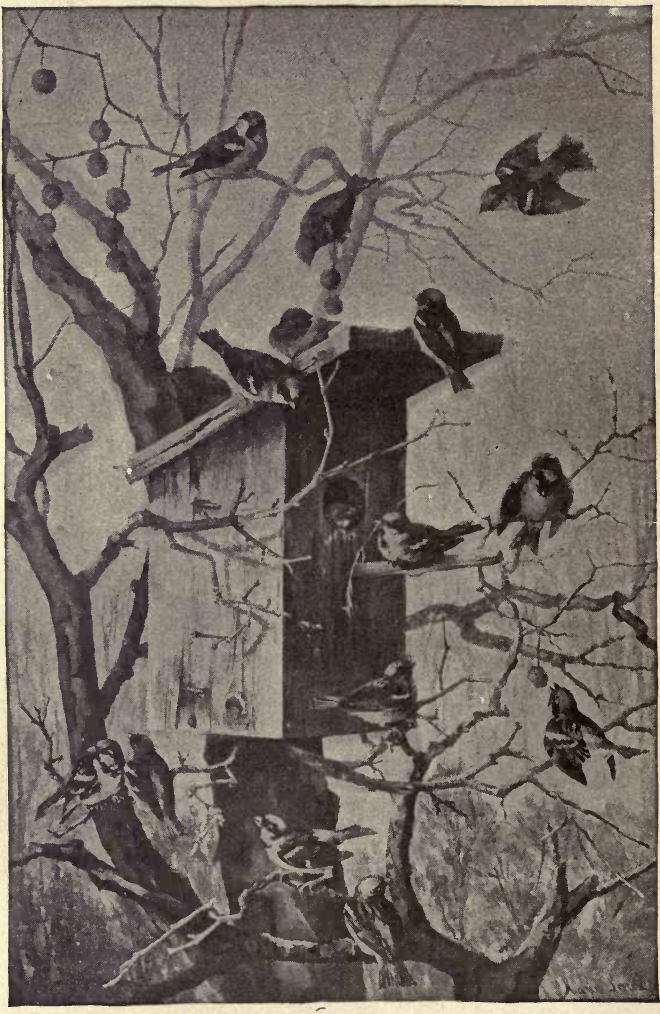
AMONG civilized people those are the most cheerful and happy, if possessed of a benevolent heart and favored with the ordinary gifts of fortune, who have acquired by habit and education the power of deriving pleasure from the objects that lie immediately around them. But these sources of happiness are open to those only who are endowed with sensibility, and who have received a favorable intellectual training. The more ordinary the mental and moral organization and culture of the individual, the more far-fetched and dear-bought must be his enjoyments. Nature has given us in full development only those appetites which are necessary to our physical well-being. She has left our moral powers and affections in the germ, to be developed by education and reflection. Hence that serene delight that comes chiefly from the exercise of the imagination and the moral sentiments can be felt only by persons of superior and peculiar refinement of mind. The ignorant and rude are dazzled and delighted by the display of gorgeous splendor, and charmed by loud and stirring sounds. But the more simple melodies and less attractive colors and forms, that appeal to the imagination for their principal effect, are felt only by individuals of a poetic temperament.

In proportion as we have been trained to be agreeably affected by the outward forms of nature and the sounds that proceed from the animate and the inanimate world are we capable of being happy without resorting to vulgar and costly recreations. Then will the aspects of nature, continually changing with the progress of the seasons, and the songs that enliven their march, satisfy that craving for agreeable sensations which would otherwise lead us away from humble and healthful pursuits to those of an artificial and exciting life. The value of these pleasures of sentiment is derived not so much from their cheapness as from their favorable moral influences, that improve and pleasantly exercise the mind without tasking its powers. Those quiet emotions, half musical and half poetical, which are awakened by the songs of birds, belong to this class of refined enjoyments.

But the music of birds, though delightful to all, conveys active and durable pleasure only to those who have learned to associate with their notes, in connection with the scenes of nature, a crowd of interesting and romantic images. To many persons of this character it affords more delight than the most brilliant music of the concert or the opera. In vain will it be said as an objection, that the notes of birds have no charm save that of association, and do not equal the melody of a simple reed or flageolet. It is sufficient to reply that the most delightful influences of nature proceed from sights and sounds that appeal to a poetic sentiment through the medium of slight and almost insensible impressions made upon the eye and the ear. At the moment when these physical impressions exceed a certain mean, the spell is broken, and the enjoyment, if it continues, becomes sensual, not intellectual. How soon, indeed, would the songs of birds pall upon the ear if they were loud and brilliant like a band of instruments. It is simplicity that gives them their charm.

As an illustration of the truth of this remark, I would say that simple melodies have among all people exercised a greater power over the imagination, though producing less pleasure to the ear, than louder and more complicated music. Nature employs a very small amount of physical agency to create sentiment, and when an excess is used a diminished effect is produced. I am persuaded that the effect of our sacred music is injured by an excess of harmony or too great a volume of sound. A loud crash of thunder deafens and terrifies, but its low and distant rumbling produces a pleasant emotion of sublimity.

The songs of birds are as intimately allied with poetry as with music. "Feathered Lyric" is a name that has been applied to the Lark by one of the English poets; and the analogy is apparent when we consider how much the song of this bird resembles a lyrical ballad in its influence on the mind. Though the song of a bird is without words, how plainly does it suggest a long train of agreeable images of love, beauty, friendship, and home! When a young person is affected with grief, he seldom fails, if endowed with a sensitive mind, to listen to the birds as sympathizers in his affliction. Through them the deities of the grove seem to offer him their consolation. By his companionship with the objects of nature all pleasing sights and sounds have become anodynes for his sorrow; and those who have this mental alembic for turning grief into poetic melancholy cannot be reduced to despondency. This poetic sentiment exalts our pleasures and soothes our afflictions by some illusive charm, derived from religion or romance. Without this reflection of light from poetry, what is the passion of love, and what our love of beauty, but a mere gravitation?



SPARROWS.

BIRDS OF THE GARDEN AND ORCHARD.

I.

THE singing-birds whose notes are familiar to us in towns and villages and in the suburbs of cities are strangers to the deep woods and solitary pastures. Our familiar birds follow in the wake of the pioneer of the wilderness, and increase in numbers with the clearing and settlement of the country, not from any feeling of dependence on the protection of man, but from the greater supply of insect food caused by the tilling of the ground. It is well known that the labors of the farmer cause an excessive multiplication of all those insects whose larvæ are cherished in the soil, and of all that infest the garden and orchard. The farm is capable of supporting insects in the ratio of its capacity for producing fruit. These will multiply with their means of subsistence contained in and upon the earth ; and birds, if not destroyed by man, will increase with the insects that constitute their food.

Hence we may explain the fact, which often excites surprise, that more singing-birds are seen in the suburbs of a great city than in the deep forest, where, even in the vocal season, the silence is sometimes melancholy. The species which are thus familiar in their habits, though but a small part of the whole number, include nearly all the singing-birds that are known to the generality of our people. These are the birds of the garden and orchard. There are many other species, wild and solitary in their habits, which are delightful songsters in the uncultivated regions lying outside of the farm. Even these are rare in the depths of the forest. They live on the edge of the wood and the half-wooded pasture. The birds of the garden and orchard have been frequently described, and are very generally known, though but little has been said of their powers and peculiarities of song. In the sketches that follow I have given particular attention to the vocal powers of the different birds, and have attempted to designate the part that each one performs in the grand hymn of Nature.

THE SONG-SPARROW.

The Song-Sparrow, one of our most familiar birds, claims our first attention as the earliest visitant and latest resident of all the tuneful band, and one that is universally known and admired. He is plain in his vesture, undistinguished from the female by any superiority of plumage. He comes forth in the spring and takes his departure in the autumn in the same suit of russet and gray by which he is always identified. In March, before the violet has ventured to peep out from the southern slope of the pasture or the sunny brow of the hill, while the northern skies are liable at any hour to pour down a storm of sleet and snow, the Song-Sparrow, beguiled by southern winds, has already appeared, and on still mornings may be heard warbling his few merry notes, as if to make the earliest announcement of his arrival. He is therefore the true harbinger of spring; and, if not the sweetest songster, he has the merit of bearing to man the earliest tidings of the opening year, and of proclaiming the first vernal promises of the season. As the notes of those birds that sing only in the night come with a double charm to our ears, because they are harmonized by silence and hallowed by the hour that is sacred to repose, in like manner does the Song-Sparrow delight us in tenfold measure, because he sings the sweet prelude to the universal hymn.

His haunts are fields half cultivated and bordered with wild shrubbery. He is somewhat more timid than the Hair-Bird, that comes close up to our doorsteps to find the crumbs that are swept from our tables. Though his voice is constantly heard in the garden and orchard, he selects a retired spot for his nest, preferring not to trust his progeny to the doubtful mercy of the lords of creation. In some secure retreat, under a tussock of moss or a tuft of low shrubbery, the female sits upon her nest of soft dry grass, containing four or five eggs of a greenish-white surface covered with brownish specks. Beginning in April, she rears two and often three broods during the season, and her mate prolongs his notes until the last brood has flown from the nest.

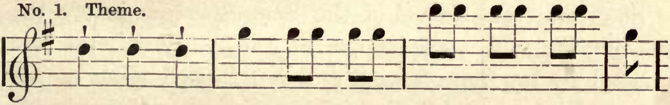
The notes of the Song-Sparrow would not entitle him to rank with our principal singing-birds, were it not for the remarkable variations in his song, in which I think he is equalled by no other bird. Of these variations there are six or seven that may be distinctly recognized, differing enough to be considered separate tunes, but they are all based upon the same theme. The bird does not warble these in regular succession. It is in the habit of repeating one of them several times, then leaves it and repeats another in a similar manner. Mr. Charles S. Paine, of East Randolph, Massachusetts, was, I believe, the first to observe this habit of the Song-Sparrow. He took note, on one occasion, of the number of times a particular bird sang each of the tunes. As he had numbered them, the bird sang No. 1, 21 times; No. 2, 36 times; No. 3, 23 times; No. 4, 19 times; No. 5, 21 times; No. 6, 32 times; No. 7, 18 times. He made the same experiment with a dozen different individuals; and was confident from these trials that each male has his seven songs, or variations of the theme, and they are all equally irregular in the order of singing them.

After reading Mr. Paine's letter, I listened carefully to the Song-Sparrow, in the summer of 1857, that I might learn to distinguish the different tunes, as reported by him. I had never thought of it before; but in less than a week I could distinctly recognize the whole seven, and was convinced that his observations were perfectly correct. It is remarkable that when one powerful singer takes up a particular tune, other birds in the vicinity will follow with the same. These are mostly in triple time, some in common time, while in others the time could not be distinguished. Each tune, however, consists of four bars or strains, sometimes five, though late in the season the song is frequently broken off at the end of the third strain. This habit of varying his notes through so many changes, and the singularly fine intonations of many of them, entitle the Song-Sparrow to a very high rank as a singing-bird.

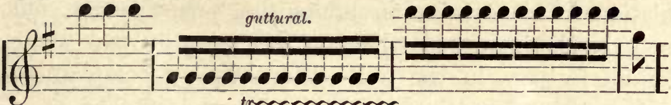
There is a plain difference in the expression of these several variations. The one which I have marked No. 3 is very plaintive, and is in common time. No. 2 is the one which I have most frequently heard. No. 5 is querulous and unmusical. There is a remarkable precision in the Song-Sparrow's notes, and the finest singers are those which, in the language of musicians, display the least execution. Some blend their notes together so rapidly and promiscuously, and use so many operatic flourishes, that if all were like them it would be impossible to distinguish the seven different variations in the song of this bird.

Whether these tunes of the Song-Sparrow express to his mate or to others of his species different sentiments, and convey different messages, or whether they are the offspring of mere caprice, I cannot determine. Nor have I learned whether a certain hour of the day or a certain state of the weather predisposes the bird to sing a particular tune. This point may perhaps be determined by some future observer, who may discover that the birds of this species have their matins and their vespers, their songs of rejoicing and their notes of complaint, of courtship when in presence of their mate, and of encouragement and solace when she is sitting upon her nest. Since Nature has a benevolent object in every instinct bestowed upon her creatures, it is not probable that this habit of the Song-Sparrow is one that serves no important end in his life and habits. All the variations of his song are given below; and though individuals differ in their singing, the notes will afford a good general idea of the several tunes.

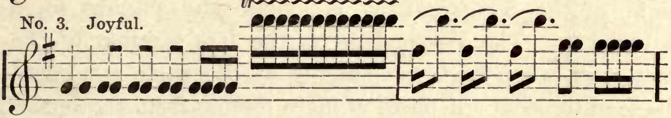
No. 1. Theme.



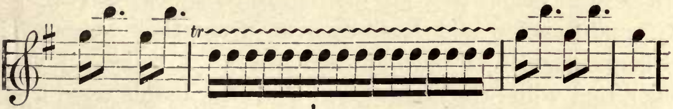
No. 2. Brisk.



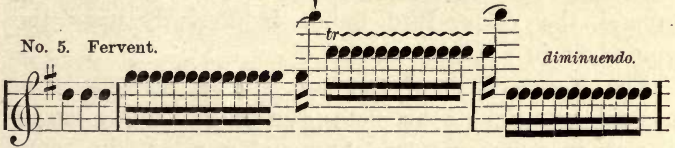
No. 3. Joyful.



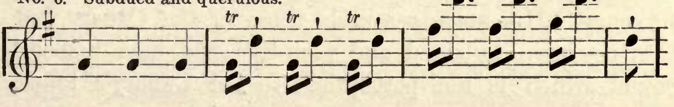
No. 4. Plaintive.



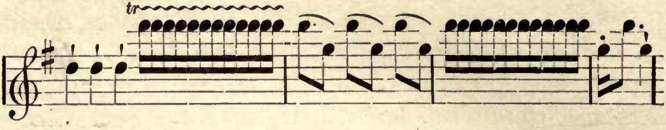
No. 5. Fervent.



No. 6. Subdued and querulous.



No. 7. Brilliant.



NOTE. — The notes marked *guttural* seem to me to be performed by a rapid trilling of these notes with their octave. No bird sings constantly in so regular time as is represented above, and the intervals between the high notes are very irregular. Both the time and the tune are in great measure *ad libitum.*

THE VESPER-SPARROW.

Soon after the arrival of the Song-Sparrow, before the flowers are yet conspicuous in the meadows, we are greeted by the more fervent and lengthened notes of the Vesper-Bird, poured forth with a peculiarly pensive modulation. This species resembles the Song-Sparrow, but may be distinguished when on the wing by two white lateral feathers in the tail. The chirp, or complaining note, of the Song-Sparrow is louder and pitched on a lower key. The Vesper-Bird is the less familiar of the two, and, when both are singing at the same time, will be seen to occupy a position more remote from the house. In several places they are distinguished by the names of Ground-Sparrow and Bush-Sparrow, from their supposed different habits of placing their nests. I believe, however, that while the Song-Sparrow always builds upon the ground, the Vesper-Bird builds indifferently upon the ground or in a bush.

The Vesper-Bird, of the two species, attracts more general attention to his notes, because he sings a longer though more monotonous song, and warbles with more fervency. His notes resemble those of the Canary, but they are more subdued and plaintive, and have a reedy sound which is not perceptible in the Canary's tones.

This bird is somewhat periodical in his singing habits, confining his lays in some measure to certain hours of the day and conditions of the weather. The Song-Sparrow sings about equally during every hour from morning till night, and the different performers do not always join in concert. This habit renders the little songster more companionable, but at the same time causes his notes to be less regarded than those of the Vesper-Bird, who sings in concert with others of his kind, and at more regular periods.

The Vesper-Bird joins at day-spring with all his kindred in the general anthem of morn, after which he sings occasionally during the day, especially at an hour when it is still and cloudy, but most fervently during the sun's decline until dusk. Hence is derived the name it bears, from its evening hymn, or vespers. There are particular states of the weather that call out the songsters of this species and make them tuneful, as when rain is suddenly followed by sunshine, or when a clear sky is suddenly darkened by clouds, presenting an occasional morn and an occasional even. In this respect these birds are not peculiar, but by singing together in numbers their habit is more noticeable. We seldom hear one of them singing alone. When one begins, all others in the vicinity immediately join him.

The usual resorts of the Vesper-Bird are the hayfields and pastures, from which he has derived the name of Grass-Finch. His voice is heard frequently by rustic roadsides, where he picks up a considerable part of his subsistence; and it is remarkable that this songster more frequently sings from a fence, a post, or a rail than from a tree or a bush. This is the little bird that so generally serenades us during an evening walk at a short distance from the town, and not so near the woods as the haunts of the Thrushes. When we go out into the country on pleasant days in June or July, at nightfall we hear multitudes of them singing sweetly from many different points in the fields and farms.

THE HAIR-BIRD.

A gentle and harmless little bird, attracting attention chiefly by his tameness and familiarity, chirping at all hours, but without a very melodious song, is the Hair-Bird, belonging to the family of Sparrows, but differing from all the others in many of his habits. He is one of the smallest of the tribe, of an ashen-brown color above and grayish-white beneath. He wears a little cap or turban of velvety-brown upon his head, and by this mark he is readily distinguished from his kindred. Relying on his diminutive size for security, he comes quite up to our doorstep, mindless of the people who are assembled near it, and, fearless of danger, picks up the scattered crumbs and seeds. His voice is not heard in the spring so early as that of the Song-Sparrow and the Bluebird. He lives chiefly upon seeds, though like other granivorous birds he feeds his young with larvæ. This is a general practice among the seed-eaters, in order to provide their young with soft and digestible food. Nature has provided in a different manner, however, for the Pigeon tribe. The parent bird softens the food in its own crop before it is given to the offspring. From the peculiar manner in which the young are fed comes the expression "sucking doves."

It is common to speak disparagingly of the Hair-Bird, as if he were good for nothing, without beauty and without song. He is despised even by epicures, because his weight of flesh is not worth a charge of powder and shot. Though he is contemptuously styled the "Chipping-Sparrow," on account of his shrill note, this name I shall never consent to apply to him. His voice is no mean accompaniment to the general chorus which may be heard on every still morning before sunrise during May and June. His continued trilling note is to this warbling band like the octave flute, as heard in a grand concert of artificial instruments. The voices of numbers of his species, which are the first to be heard and the last to become silent in the morning, serve to fill up the pauses in this sylvan anthem like a running accompaniment in certain musical compositions. How little soever the Hair-Bird may be valued as a songster, his voice, I am sure, would be most sadly missed, were it nevermore to be heard charmingly blending with the louder voices of other choristers.

How often, on still sultry nights in summer, when hardly a breeze was stirring, and when the humming of the moth might be plainly heard as it glided by my open window, have I been charmed by the note of this little bird, uttered trillingly from the branch of a neighboring tree. He seems to be the sentinel whom Nature has appointed to watch for the first gleam of dawn, which he always faithfully announces before any other bird is awake. Two or three strains from his octave pipe are the signal for a general awakening of the birds, and one by one they join the song, until the whole air resounds with an harmonious medley of voices.

The Hair-Bird has a singular habit of sitting on the ground while thus chirping at early dawn; but I am confident he is perched in a tree during the night. The nest is most frequently placed upon an apple-tree, or upon some tall bush, seldom more than ten feet from the ground. I have found it in the vinery upon the trunk of an elm. It is very neatly constructed of the fibres of roots firmly woven together, and beautifully lined with fine soft hair, whence his name. It is unsurpassed in neatness and beauty by the nest of any other bird. The eggs are four in number, of a pale blue with dark spots.

THE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH.

During all the pleasant days of autumn, when the thistle and sunflower are ripening their seeds, after the songs of the birds have ceased, and we greet them only as friends after the concert is over, we hear the plaintive chirping of the Hemp-Birds, and see the frequent flashing of their golden plumage among the thistles and golden-rods. Like butterflies they are seen in all the open pastures and meadows that abound in compound flowers, not in flocks, but scattered in great numbers, and always, when flying from one field to another, uttering their singularly plaintive but cheerful cry. This is so sweetly modulated that, when many of them are assembled, the songs of early summer seem to be temporarily revived. They are very familiar and active, always flitting about our flower-gardens when they abound in marigolds and asters.

The Hemp-Bird bears considerable resemblance to the Canary in his habits and the notes of his song. Being deficient in compass and variety, he cannot be ranked with the finest of our songsters. But he has great sweetness of tone, and is equalled by few birds in the rapidity of his execution. His note of complaint is also like that of the Canary, and is heard at almost all times of the year. He utters, when flying, a rapid series of notes during the repeated undulations of his flight, and they seem to be uttered with each effort he makes to rise.

The female does not build her nest before the first broods of the Robin and the Song-Sparrow have flown. Mr. Augustus Fowler, of Danvers, thinks, from his observation of the habits of these birds when feeding their young, that the cause of this delay is "that they would be unable to find in the spring those milky seeds which are the necessary food for their young," and takes occasion to allude to that beneficent law of Nature providing that these birds "should not bring forth their young until the time when the seeds used by them for food have passed into the milk, and may be easily dissolved by the stomach."

These little birds are remarkable for associating at a certain season, and singing as it were in choirs. "During spring and summer," says Mr. Fowler, "they rove about in small flocks, and in July will assemble together in considerable numbers on a particular tree, seemingly for no other purpose than to sing. These concerts are held by them on the forenoon of each day for a week or ten days, after which they soon build their nests. I am inclined to believe that this is the time of their courtship, and that they have a purpose in their meetings beside that of singing. If perchance one is heard in the air, the males utter their call-note with great emphasis, particularly if the new-comer be a female; and while, in her undulating flight, she describes a circle preparatory to alighting, they will stand almost erect, move their heads to the right and left, and burst simultaneously into song."

While engaged in these concerts it would seem as if they were governed by some rule that enabled them to time their voices, and to swell or diminish the volume of sound. Some of this effect is undoubtedly produced by the gradual manner in which the different voices join in harmony, beginning with one or two and increasing their numbers in rapid succession, until all are singing at once, and then in the same gradual manner becoming silent. One voice leads on another, the numbers multiplying, until they make a loud shout which dies away gradually, and a single voice winds up the chorus. These concerts are repeated at intervals for several days, ending probably with the period of courtship.

A singular habit of the Hemp-Bird is that of building a nest, and then tearing it to pieces, before any eggs have been laid in it, and using the materials to make a new nest in another place. When I was a student I repeatedly observed this operation in some Lombardy poplars that grew before my study windows. I thought the male bird only addicted to this habit, and that it might be his method of amusing himself before his mate is ready to occupy the nest. This is made of cotton, the down of the fern, and other soft materials woven together with threads or the fibres of bark, and lined with cow's-hair. It is commonly placed in the fork of the slender branches of a maple, linden, or poplar, and is fastened to them with singular ingenuity.

THE PURPLE FINCH OR AMERICAN LINNET.

The American Linnet is almost a new acquaintance of many people in Eastern Massachusetts. In my early days, which were passed in Essex County, I seldom met one in my rambles. It is now very common in this region, and has been more generally observed since the custom of planting the spruce and the fir in our gardens and enclosures. The Linnet, though not early in building its nest, is sometimes heard to sing earlier even than the Song-Sparrow. I have frequently heard his notes in March; and once, in a mild season, I heard one warbling cheerily on the 18th of February. But the Linnet does not persevere like the Song-Sparrow and other early birds. He may sing on a fine day in March, and you may not hear him again before the middle of April. Soon after that time he becomes a very constant singer.

The notes of this bird are very simple and melodious, delivered without precision, and different individuals differ exceedingly in capacity. It is generally believed that the young males are the best singers, and that age diminishes their vocal powers. This is the supposition of Mr.

Nuttall; but I have not been able to test the truth of it by my own observation. The greater number utter only a few strains, resembling the notes of the Brigadier. These are constantly repeated during the greater part of the day. The song usually consists of four or five strains, very much alike; but when the bird is animated he multiplies his notes *ad libitum*, varying the modulation only by greater emphasis. I have not observed that the Linnet is more prone to sing in the morning and evening than at any other hour.

The Linnet is a somewhat eccentric bird in his ways. He is usually high up in an elm or other tall tree when he sings, and almost out of sight, like the Brigadier. Hence he is as often heard in the elms in the city as in the country. He sings according to no rules, at no particular hour of the day, with but little regard to season, and utters notes that are wholly wanting in precision. His song is without a theme, and seems to be a sort of *fantasia*. He may often be seen sitting on a fence warbling with ecstasy and keeping his wings in rapid vibration all the while. He is also regardless of the mischief he may do. He feeds upon the flower-buds of the elm and then upon those of the pear-tree, thus damaging our gardens and keeping himself at a safe distance from the angry horticulturist after he has concluded his feast.

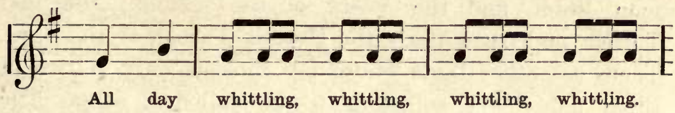
I have seen the Linnet frequently in confinement, which he very cheerfully bears; but he will not sing if he be placed near a Canary-Bird, nor does he at any time sing so well as in a state of freedom. He likewise changes his plumage; and soon, instead of a little brown bird with crimson neck, you see one variously mottled with brown and buff. The finest and most prolonged strains are delivered by the Linnet while on the wing. On such occasions only does he sing with fervor. While perched on a tree his song is usually short and not greatly varied. I think there may be less difference than is commonly supposed in the powers of individuals, and that the songs of the same warbler vary with his feelings. If you closely watch one on a tree while singing, he may be observed suddenly to take flight, and while poising himself in the air, though still advancing, to pour out a continued strain of melody with all the rapture of a Skylark.

The male American Linnet is crimson on the head, neck, and throat, dusky on the upper parts of his body, and beneath somewhat straw-colored. It is remarkable that some of the males are wanting in the crimson head and neck, being plainly clad, like the female. These are supposed to be old birds, and the loss of color is attributed to age. I am doubtful of this, for it can hardly be supposed that any bird can escape the gunner long enough to become gray with age. The only nests of this bird which I have seen were upon spruce-trees. The eggs are of a pale green with dark spots of irregular size.

THE PEABODY-BIRD.

In the northern parts of New England only are the inhabitants familiar with the habits of the Peabody-Bird, or White-throated Sparrow. I have seen it, however, in Cambridge; and during a season when the currant-worm was very destructive, one individual came frequently into my garden and employed himself in picking the caterpillars from a row of currant-bushes. As the fruit was then ripened, or partially ripe, his appearance so late in the season led me to infer that he had probably a nest somewhere in the Cambridge woods. This is a large Sparrow, and a very fine singing-bird. Samuels says: "The song of this species is very beautiful. It is difficult of description, but resembles nearly the syllables 'chea, dêe de; dê-d-de, dê-d-de, dê-d-de, dê-d-de, uttered first loud and clear, and rapidly falling in tone and decreasing in volume. This is chanted during the morning and the latter part of the day. I have often heard it at different hours of the night, when I have been encamped in the deep forest, and the effect at that time was indescribably sweet and plaintive. The fact that the bird sings often in the night has given it the name of the Nightingale in many places, and the title is well earned."

The inhabitants of Maine mention this bird as singing late in the season. This is caused by his delay in building his nest, which is not done before June. The words used by the Peabody-Bird in his song are thus described in that State: —



SINGING-BIRDS.

THE Singing-Birds, with reference to their songs, are distinguishable into four classes: — The Rapid singers, whose song is uninterrupted, of considerable length, and delivered in apparent ecstasy; the Moderate singers, whose notes are slowly modulated, without pauses or rests between the different strains; the Interrupted singers, who sometimes modulate their notes with rapidity, but make a distinct pause after each strain. The Linnet and the Bobolink are examples of the first class; the common Robin and the Veery of the second; the Red Thrush and particularly the Hermit Thrush of the third. There are other birds whose lay consists only of two or three notes, not sufficient to be called a song. The Bluebird and the Golden Robin are of this class.

June, in this part of the world, is the most tuneful month of the year. Many of our principal songsters do not appear until near the middle of May; but all, whether early or late, continue to sing throughout the month of June. The birds that arrive the latest are not always the latest in returning. The period of time they occupy in song depends chiefly upon the number of broods of young they raise in the year. If they raise but one brood in a season, their period of song is short; if they raise two or more, they may prolong their singing into August. Not one of our New England birds is an autumnal warbler, though the Robin, the Wood-Sparrow, and the Song-Sparrow are often heard after the first of September. The tuneful season in New England comprises April, May, and the three summer months.

There are certain times of the day, as well as certain seasons of the year, when birds are most musical. The grand concert of the feathered tribe takes place during the hour between dawn and sunrise. During the remainder of the day until evening they have no concerts. Each individual sings according to its habits, but we do not hear them collectively. At sunset there is an apparent attempt to unite once more in chorus, but this is far from being so loud or so general as in the morning, when they suffer less disturbance from man.

There are but few birds whose notes could be accurately described upon the gamut. We seldom perceive anything like artificial pauses or true musical intervals in their time or melody. Yet they have no deficiency of musical ear, for almost any singing-bird when young may be taught to warble an artificial tune. Birds do not dwell steadily upon one note at any time. They are constantly sliding and quavering, and their songs are full of pointed notes. There are some species whose lays, like those of the Whippoorwill, resemble an artificial modulation, but these are rare. In general their musical intervals cannot be accurately distinguished on account of the rapidity of their utterance. I have often endeavored to transcribe their notes upon the gamut, but have not yet been able to communicate to any person by this means a correct idea of the song, except in a few extraordinary cases. Such attempts are almost useless.

Different individuals of certain species often sing very unlike each other; but if we listen attentively to a number of them, we shall detect in all their songs a *theme*, as it is termed by musicians, of which they severally warble their respective variations. Every song of any species is, technically speaking, a fantasia constructed upon this theme, from which, though they may greatly vary their notes, no individual ever departs. The theme of the Song-Sparrow is easily written on the gamut, out of which the bird makes many variations; that of the Robin's song is never more than slightly varied; but I have not been able to detect in the medley of the Bobolink any theme at all.

The song of birds is innate. It is not learned, as some have supposed, from parental instruction; else why should not a Cowbird sing like a Vireo, which is sometimes its foster parent, and would undoubtedly, if this were the usual custom, be as willing to teach the young interloper to sing as to supply it with food? Birds of the same species have by their organization a disposition to utter certain sounds when under the influence of certain feelings. If the young bird learned of its parents, nature would have made the female the singer instead of the male, who, I am confident, would not trouble himself to be a music-teacher, and, if he were willing to take this task upon him, would not select the males only to be his pupils. If we should see repeated instances of the exemplification of their mode of instruction, — if we should see the young birds standing around an old cock Robin while he delivers his song, note by note, for the young to imitate, — we should have some reason to believe that all male singing-birds are music-teachers as well as performers. But after all, would an old Bobolink ever have patience to repeat his notes slowly to his young for their instruction?

Many birds are, however, imitators of sounds, and will sometimes learn the songs of other birds when confined in a cage near them. The Bobolink when caged near a Canary readily learns its song, but in a wild state he never deviates from his own peculiar medley. Nature has provided each species with notes unlike those of any other as one of the means by which they should identify their own kindred, and there is reason to believe that if one of them had never heard the note of his own parents he would still sing like all his predecessors. In a state of confinement birds will occasionally imitate the notes of other species, and in this respect they differ entirely from quadrupeds.

The song of birds seems to be the means used by the male, not only to woo the female, but to call her to himself when absent. Before he has chosen his mate he sings more loudly than at any subsequent period. The different males of the same species seem at that time to be vying with each other, and the one that has the loudest and most varied song is likely to be the first attended by a mate. When the two birds are employed in building their nest, the male constantly attends his partner and sings less loudly and frequently than before. This comparative silence continues until the female begins to sit. During incubation the male again sings with emphasis at his usual hours, perched upon some neighboring tree; as if to assure her of his presence, but more probably to entice her away from the nest. It is a curious fact that male birds seem to be displeased to a certain extent while their mate is sitting, on account of her absence, and are more than usually vociferous, sometimes with the evident intention of coquetting with other females.

After the young brood is hatched the attention of the male bird is occupied with the care of his offspring, though he is far less assiduous in his parental duties than the female. If we watch a pair of Robins when they have a nest full of young birds, we shall see the female bring the greater part of their food. The male bird continues to sing until the young have left their nest; but if there is to be no other brood, he becomes immediately silent. If, early in the season, a couple whose habit is to rear but one brood are robbed of their nest, they will make a new one, and the male in this case continues in song to a later period than those who were not disturbed.

If the male bird loses his mate during incubation, he seldom takes her place, but becomes once more very tuneful, uttering his call-notes loudly for several days and finally changing them into song. It would seem, therefore, that the song of the bird proceeds in some degree from discontent, — from his want of a mate, in the one case, or from her absence when she is sitting, in the other. The buoyancy of spirits produced by the season and the full supply of his physical wants are joined with the pains of absence, which he is determined to relieve by exerting all his power to entice his partner from her nest. I have often thought that the almost uninterrupted song of caged birds proves their singing to arise from a desire to entice a companion into their own little prison. Hence, when an old bird from our fields is caught and caged during the breeding-season, he will continue his tunefulness long after all others of the same species have become silent. The Bobolink in a state of freedom will not sing after the middle of July; but if one be caught and caged, he will continue to warble more loudly than he did in his native meadows until September.

It is generally believed that singing-birds are chiefly confined to temperate latitudes. That this is an error is apparent from the testimony of travellers, who speak of the birds of Africa and of the Sandwich Islands as singing delightfully; and some fine songsters are occasionally imported from tropical countries. It should be considered that in these hot regions the birds are more scattered and are not so well known as those of temperate latitudes, which are generally inhabited by civilized man. Savages and barbarians, who are the principal inhabitants of hot countries, are seldom observant of the songs or habits of birds. A musician of the feathered race, no less than a human singer, must have an appreciating audience or his powers could not be made known to the world. But even with the same audience, the tropical birds would probably be less esteemed than those of equal merit in our latitudes, for amid the stridulous and deafening sounds from insects in warm climates the notes of birds are scarcely audible. Probably, however, the comparative number of singing-birds is greater in the temperate zone, where there are more of those species that build low, and live in the shrubbery, which the singing-birds chiefly frequent. In warm climates the birds are obliged to live in trees, and the vegetation of the surface of the ground will not support the Finches and Buntings, which are the chief singers of the North.

APRIL.

Dear to the poet and to the lover of nature is the month of April, when she first timidly plants her footsteps upon the dank meadow and the mossy hillside, clothing the dark brown sods with tufts of greenery, waking the early birds, and cherishing the tender field-flowers. Her hands are ever busy, hanging purple fringes upon the elm and golden tassels upon the willow bough, and weaving for the maple a vesture of crimson. She brings life to the frozen streams, verdure to the seared meadows, and music to the woods, which have heard nothing for months save the solemn moaning of their own boughs and the echoes of the woodman's axe from an adjoining fell. We welcome April as the comforter of our weariness after long confinement, as the bearer of pleasures which her bounty only can offer, as a sweet maiden entering the door of our prison with hands full of budding flowers and breath scented with violets.

A gladness and hopefulness attend us on the return of spring which are unfelt at other seasons, and produce a sensation like that of the renewal of youth. We are certainly more hopeful at this time than in the autumn, and we look back upon the lapse of the three winter months with a less painful sense of the loss of so much of our allotted period of life than upon the lapse of the three summer months. Though the flight of any season carries us equally onward in our mortal progress, we cannot avoid the feeling that the lapse of winter is our gain as that of summer was our loss. And surely, of these two reflections, the one that deceives is better than the one that utters the truth; and though we are several months older than we were in the autumn, we may thank Heaven for the delusion that makes us feel younger.

Spring, the true season of hopefulness and action, is unfavorable to thought. So many delightful objects are constantly inviting us to pleasure, that we are tempted to neglect our serious pursuits, and we feel too much exhilaration for confinement or study. It is not while surrounded by pleasures of any kind that we are most capable of reflecting upon them or describing their influence; for the act of thinking upon them requires a suspension of our enjoyments. Hence, in winter we can most easily discourse upon the charms of spring and summer, when the task becomes a pleasant occupation, by reviving the scenes of past delights blended with a foretaste of joys that are to come. But when the rising flowers, the perfumed breezes, and the music of the animated tenants of the streams, woods, and orchards, are all inviting us to come forth and partake of the pleasures they proffer, it is wearisome to sit down apart from all these delights to the comparatively dull task of describing them.

As childhood is not always happy, and as youth is liable to the sorrows and afflictions of later life, the spring is not always cheerful, and the vernal skies are sometimes blackened with wintry tempests, and the earth bound in ice and frost. Even in April the little flowers that are just peeping out from their winter coverts are often greeted by snow, and spring's "ethereal mildness" is exchanged for harsh winds and cloudy skies. In vain do the crocus, the snowdrop, and the yellow narcissus appear in the gardens, or the blue violet and the saxifrage spangle the southern slopes of the hills, — the north-wind is not tempered by their beauty nor beguiled by the songs of the early birds.

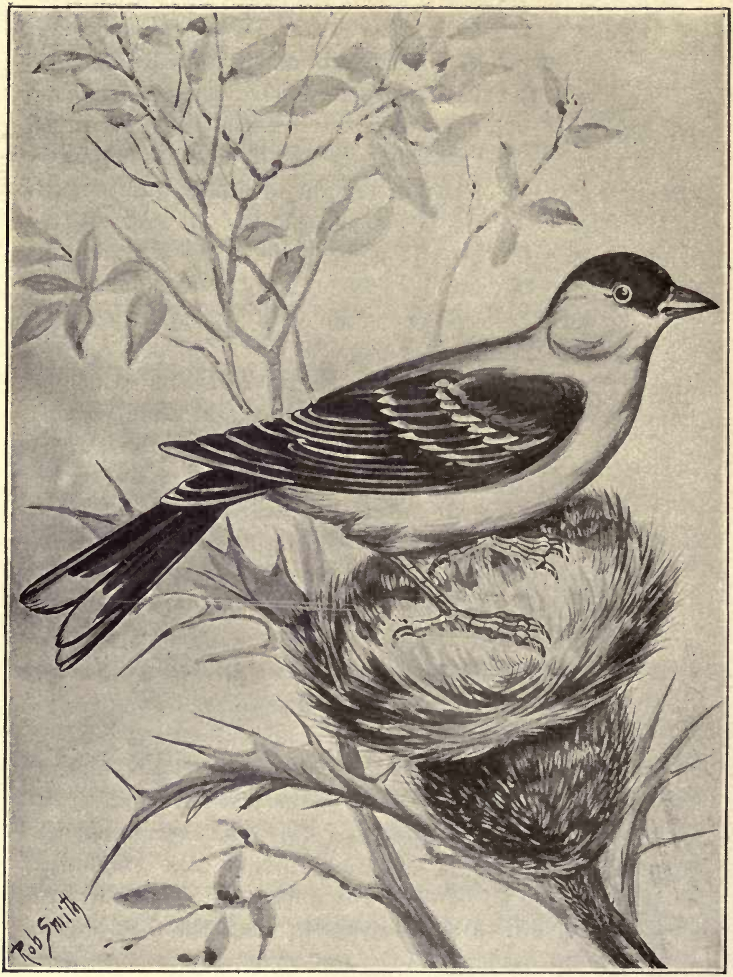
April — the morning of the year, as March was its twilight, — that uncertain time when the clouds seem like exiled wanderers over the blue field of light, hurrying in disorganized cohorts to some place of rest or dissolution — daily flatters us with hopes which she seems reluctant to fulfil. But every invisible agent of nature is silently weaving a drapery of verdure to spread around the footsteps of the more lovely month that is soon to arrive. We see the beginnings of this work of resurrection in thousands of small tufted rings of herbage scattered over the fields, and daily multiplying, until every knoll is crowned with blue, white, and crimson flowers that will join to gladden the heyday of spring.

When at length the south-wind calls together his vernal messengers, and leads them forth in the sunshine to their work of gladness, the frosty conqueror resigns his sceptre, and beauty springs up in the place of desolation. The bee rebuilds his honeyed masonry, the swelling buds redden in the maples, and every spray of the forest and orchard is brightened with a peculiar gloss that gives character to the vernal tinting of the woods. The ices that have bound the earth for half the year are dissolved; the mountain snows are spread out in fertilizing lakes upon the plains, and the redwing pipes his garrulous notes over the abiding-place of the trillium and the meadow cowslip. The lowlands, so magnificent in autumn, when glowing with a profusion of asters and golden-rods, are now whitened with this sheet of glistening waters, put into constant agitation by multitudes of frogs tumbling about in the shallows while engaged in their croaking frolics.

April is the month of brilliant skies constantly shadowed by dark, rapidly moving clouds, of brown meadows and plashy foot-paths. The barren hills are velveted with moss of a perfect greenness, delicately shaded with a profusion of glossy purple stems, like so many hairs, terminated with the peculiar flower of the plant; and long stripes of verdure mark the progress of the new-born rivulets, as they pursue their irregular course down the hillside into the valleys. But the damp grounds, frequently almost impassable from standing water, are interspersed with little dry knolls covered with mosses and lycopodiums, where the early flowers of spring delight to nestle, embosomed in their soft verdure. Upon these evergreen mounds the fringed polygala spreads a beautiful hue of crimson; and while gathering its flowers, we discover, here and there, a delicate wood-anemone, with its mild eyes not yet open to the light of day. But so few flowers are abroad that the bee when it comes forth in quest of honey must feel like one who is lost and wandering in space. It can revel only in gardens where the sweet-scented flowers of another clime spread abroad a perfume that is but a false signal of the weather of its adopted climate.

The odors that perfume the air in the latter part of this month are chiefly exhaled from the unfolding buds of the flowering trees and shrubs, and from pine woods. The balm of Gilead and other poplars, while the scales are dropping from their hibernacles, to loose the young leaves and flowers from their confinement, afford the most grateful of odors, and are a part of the peculiar incense of spring. But there are exhalations from the soil in April, when the ploughman is turning his furrows, that afford an agreeable sensation of freshness, almost like fragrance, resembling the scent of the cool breezes, which, wafted over beds of dulses and sea-weeds, when the tide is low, often rise up suddenly in the heat of summer.

As April advances, the familiar bluebirds are busy among the hollows of old trees, where they rear their young secure from depredation.



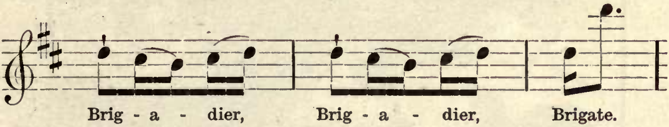
GOLDFINCH

BIRDS OF THE GARDEN AND ORCHARD.

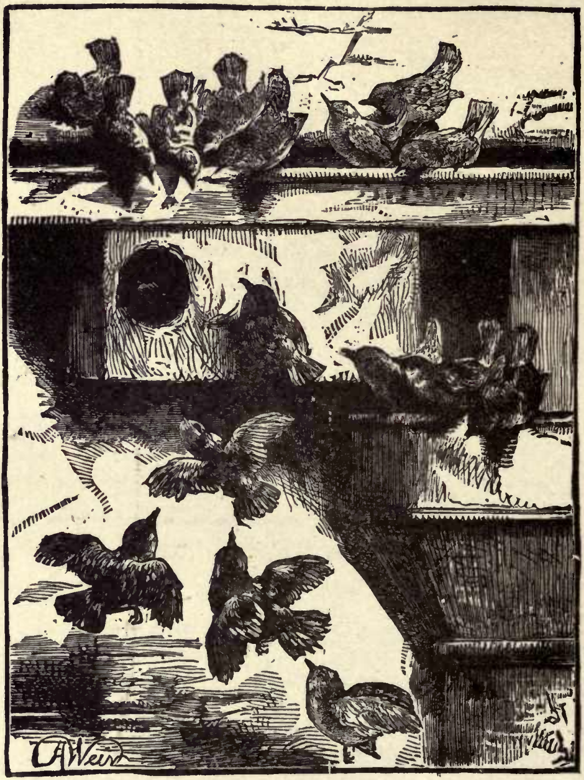
II.

THE VIREO.

In the elms on Boston Common, and in all the lofty trees of the suburbs, as well as in the country villages, are two little birds whose songs are heard daily and hourly, from the middle of May until the last of summer. They are usually concealed among the highest branches of the trees, so that it is not easy to obtain sight of them. These birds are two of our Warbling Flycatchers, or Vireos; one of which I shall designate as the Brigadier, the other as the Preacher. I give below the song of the Brigadier: —



The notes of this little invisible musician are few, simple, and melodious, and, being often repeated, they are very generally known even to those who are unacquainted with the bird. At early dawn, at noon, and at sunset its song is constantly repeated with no very long intervals, resembling, though delivered with more precision, the song of the Linnet or Purple Finch. In my boyhood, when I had no access to a book descriptive of our birds, and very seldom killed one for any purpose, I had learned nearly all the songs that were heard in the garden or wood, without knowing the physical


C.A.Weir

characters of more than one out of three of the songsters; and as I have since studied the markings of birds only by viewing them from the ground as they were perched upon bush or tree, and have never killed or dissected one for this purpose, I cannot describe all the specific or generic characters of our birds. I am well acquainted with two of our Vireos; but I cannot distinguish them from each other except by their notes, which are as familiar to me as the voice of the Robin. I have, therefore, determined to name them according to the style of their songs, leaving it to others to identify the species to which they respectively belong.

THE BRIGADIER.

The Brigadier, which is the one, I think, described by Nuttall as the Warbling Vireo, is a little olive-colored bird, that occupies the lofty tree-tops while singing and hunting his food, and is almost invisible as he is flitting among the branches, and never still. The Preacher (Red-eyed Vireo) arrives about a week or ten days earlier than the Brigadier, and is later in his departure. The two are very similar, both in their looks and their habits, frequenting the trees in the town and its suburbs in preference to the woods, singing at all hours of the day, particularly at noon, and taking their insect prey from the leaves and branches of the trees, or seizing it as it flits by their perch, and amusing themselves while thus employed with their oft-repeated notes. Each species builds a pensile nest, or places it in a fork of the slender branches of a tree. I have seen a nest of the Brigadier about ten feet from the ground on a branch of a pear-tree, so near my chamber-window that I might have reached it without difficulty. The usual habit of either species is to suspend its nest at a very considerable height from the ground.

THE PREACHER.

The Preacher is more generally known by his note, because he is incessant in his song, and particularly vocal during the heat of our long summer days, when only a few birds are singing. His style of preaching is not declamation. Though constantly talking, he takes the part of a deliberative orator, who explains his subject in a few words and then makes a pause for his hearers to reflect upon it. We might suppose him to be repeating moderately, with a pause between each sentence, "You see it, — you know it, — do you hear me? — do you believe it?" All these strains are delivered with a rising inflection at the close, and with a pause, as if waiting for an answer.

The tones of the Preacher are loud and sharp, hardly melodious, modulated somewhat like those of the Robin, though not so continuous. He is never fervent, rapid, or fluent, but, like a true zealot, he is apt to be tiresome, from the long continuance of his discourse. He pauses frequently in the middle of a strain to seize a moth or a beetle, beginning anew as soon as he has swallowed his morsel. Samuels expresses great admiration for this little bird. "Everywhere in these States," he remarks, "at all hours of the day, from early dawn until evening twilight, his sweet, half-plaintive, half-meditative carol is heard," and he adds, that of all his feathered acquaintances this is his favorite. The prolongation of his singing season until sometimes the last week in August renders him a valuable songster. When nearly all other birds have become silent, the little Preacher still continues his earnest harangue, and is sure of an audience at this late period, when he has but few rivals.

THE BOBOLINK.

There is not a singing-bird in New England that enjoys the notoriety of the Bobolink. He is like a rare wit in our social or political circles. Everybody is talking about him and quoting his remarks, and all are delighted with his company. He is not without great merits as a songster; but he is well known and admired because he is showy, noisy, and flippant, and sings only in the open field, and frequently while poised on the wing, so that any one who hears can see him and know who is the author of the strains that afford so much delight. He sings also at broad noonday, when everybody is out, and is seldom heard before sunrise, while other birds are joining in the universal chorus. He waits till the sun is up, when many of the early performers have become silent, as if determined to secure a good audience before his own exhibition.

In the grand concert of Nature it is the Bobolink who performs the recitative, which he delivers with the utmost fluency and rapidity, and we must listen carefully not to lose many of his words. He is plainly the merriest of all the feathered creation, almost continually in motion, and singing on the wing apparently in the greatest ecstasy of joy. There is not a plaintive strain in his whole performance. Every sound is as merry as the laugh of a young child, and we cannot listen to him without fancying him engaged in some jocose raillery of his companions. If we suppose him to be making love, we cannot look upon him as very deeply enamored, but rather as highly delighted with his spouse and overflowing with rapturous admiration. His mate is a neatly formed bird, with a mild expression of face, of a modest deportment, and arrayed in the plainest apparel. She seems perfectly satisfied with observing the pomp and display of her partner, and listening to his delightful eloquence of song. If we regard him as an orator, it must be allowed that he is unsurpassed in fluency and rapidity of utterance; if only as a musician, that he is unrivalled in brilliancy of execution.

I cannot look upon him as ever in a very serious humor. He seems to be a lively, jocular little fellow, who is always jesting and bantering; and when half a dozen different individuals are sporting about in the same orchard, I can imagine they might represent the persons dramatized in some comic opera. The birds never remain stationary upon a bough, singing apparently for their own solitary amusement; they are ever in company, passing to and fro, often beginning their song upon the extreme end of an apple-tree bough, then suddenly taking flight and singing the principal part while balancing themselves on the wing. The merriest part of the day with these birds is the later afternoon, during the hour preceding dewfall, before the Robin and the Veery begin their evening hymn. At that hour, assembled in company, they might seem to be practising a cotillon on the wing, each one singing to his own movement as he sallies forth and returns, and nothing can exceed their apparent merriment.

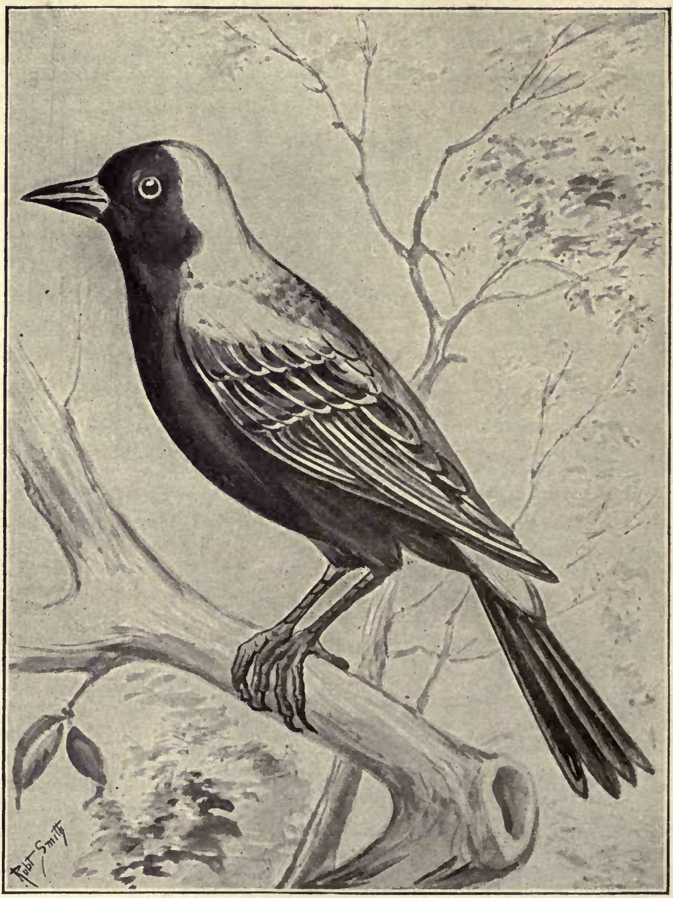
The Bobolink begins his morning song just at sunrise, at the time when the Robin, having sung from earliest daybreak, is near the close of his performance. Nature seems to have provided that the serious parts of her musical entertainment in the morning shall first be heard, and that the lively and comic strains shall follow them. In the evening this order is reversed, and after the comedy is concluded Nature lulls us to repose by the mellow notes of the Vesper-Bird, and the pensive and still more melodious strains of the solitary Thrushes.

In pleasant shining weather the Bobolink seldom flies without singing, often hovering on the wing over the place where his mate is sitting upon her ground-built nest, and pouring forth his notes with the greatest loudness and fluency. Vain are all the attempts of other birds to imitate his truly original style. The Mocking-Bird is said to give up the attempt in despair, and refuses to sing at all when confined near one in a cage. The Bobolink is not a shy bird during the breeding season; but when the young are reared and gathered in flocks the whole species become very timid. Their food consists entirely of insects during at least all the early part of summer. Hence they are not frequenters of the woods, but of the fields that supply their insect food. They evidently have no liking for solitude. They join with their own kindred, sometimes, during the breeding season, in small companies, and in the latter summer in large flocks. They love the orchard and the mowing-field, and many are the nests which are exposed by the scythe of the haymaker when performing his task early in the season.

THE O'LINCON FAMILY.

A flock of merry singing-birds were sporting in the grove;
Some were warbling cheerily and some were making love.
There were Bobolincon, Wadolincon, Winterseeble, Conquedle, —
A livelier set were never led by tabor, pipe, or fiddle; —
Crying, "Phew, shew, Wadolincon; see, see Bobolincon
Down among the tickle-tops, hiding in the buttercups;
I know the saucy chap; I see his shining cap
Bobbing in the clover there, — see, see, see!"

Up flies Bobolincon, perching on an apple-tree;
Startled by his rival's song, quickened by his raillery.
Soon he spies the rogue afloat, curvetting in the air,
And merrily he turns about and warns him to beware!
"'T is you that would a wooing go, down among the rushes O!
Wait a week, till flowers are cheery; wait a week, and ere you marry,
Be sure of a house wherein to tarry;
Wadolink, Whiskodink, Tom Denny, wait, wait, wait!"



BOBOLINK

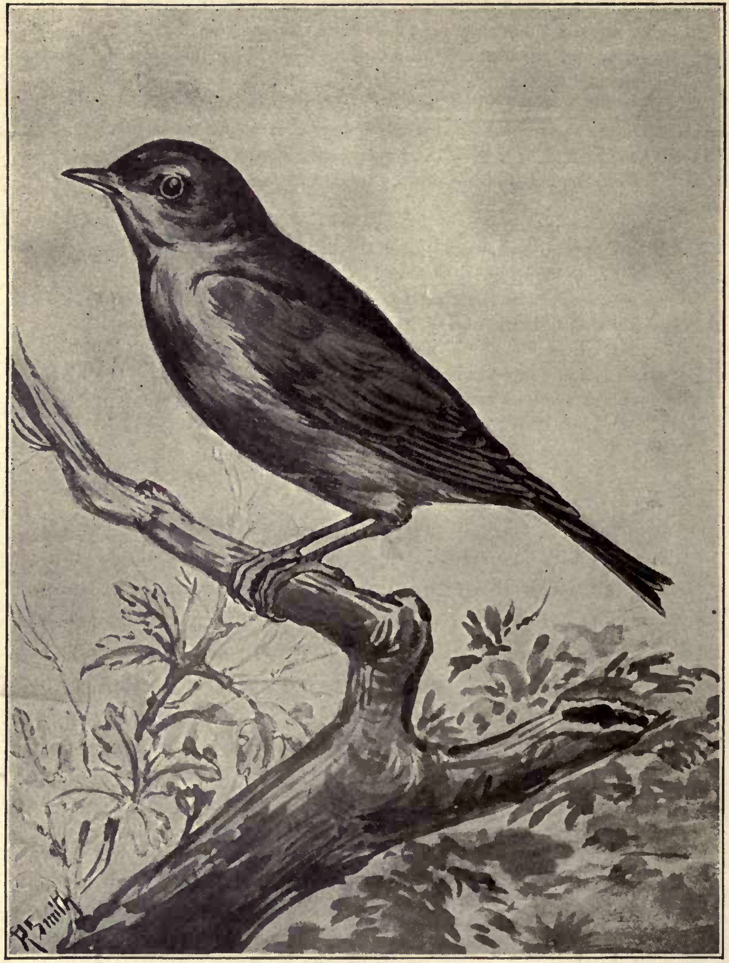
Every one 's a funny fellow ; every one 's a little mellow ;
Follow, follow, follow, follow, o'er the hill and in the hollow.
Merrily, merrily there they hie ; now they rise and now they fly ;
They cross and turn, and in and out, and down the middle and wheel about,
With a "Phew, shew, Wadolincon ; listen to me, Bobolincon !
Happy 's the wooing that 's speedily doing, that 's speedily doing,
That 's merry and over with the bloom of the clover ;
Bobolincon, Wadolincon, Winterseeble, follow, follow me !"

O what a happy life they lead, over the hill and in the mead !
How they sing, and how they play ! See, they fly away, away !
Now they gambol o'er the clearing, — off again, and then appearing ;
Poised aloft on quivering wing, now they soar, and now they sing,
"We must all be merry and moving ; we must all be happy and loving ;
For when the midsummer is come, and the grain has ripened its ear,
The haymakers scatter our young, and we mourn for the rest of the year ;
Then, Bobolincon, Wadolincon, Winterseeble, haste, haste away !"

THE BLUEBIRD.

Not one of our songsters is so intimately associated with the early spring as the Bluebird. Upon his arrival from his winter residence, he never fails to make known his presence by a few melodious notes uttered from some roof or fence in the field or garden. On the earliest morning in April, when we first open our windows to welcome the soft vernal gales, they bear on their wings the sweet strains of the Bluebird. These few notes are associated with all the happy scenes and incidents that attend the opening of the year.

The Bluebird is said to bear a strong resemblance to the English Robin-Redbreast, similar in form and size, having a red breast and short tail-feathers, with only this manifest difference, that one is olive-colored above where the other is blue. But the Bluebird does not equal the Redbreast as a songster. His notes are few and not greatly varied, though sweetly and plaintively modulated and never loud. On account of their want of variety, they do



BLUEBIRD

not enchain the listener; but they constitute an important part of the melodies of morn.

The value of the inferior singers in making up a general chorus is not sufficiently appreciated. In a musical composition, as in an anthem or oratorio, though there is a leading part, which is usually the air, that gives character to the whole, yet this leading part would often be a very indifferent piece of melody if performed without its accompaniments; and these alone would seem still more trifling and unimportant. Yet, if the composition be the work of a master, these brief strains and snatches, though apparently insignificant, are intimately connected with the harmony of the piece, and could not be omitted without a serious disparagement of the grand effect. The inferior singing-birds, bearing a similar relation to the whole choir, are indispensable as aids in giving additional effect to the notes of the chief singers.

Though the Robin is the principal musician in the general anthem of morn, his notes would become tiresome if heard without accompaniments. Nature has so arranged the harmony of this chorus, that one part shall assist another; and so exquisitely has she combined all the different voices, that the silence of any one cannot fail to be immediately perceived. The low, mellow warble of the Bluebird seems an echo to the louder voice of the Robin; and the incessant trilling or running accompaniment of the Hair-Bird, the twittering of the Swallow, and the loud, melodious piping of the Oriole, frequent and short, are sounded like the different parts in a band of instruments, and each performer seems to time his part as if by some rule of harmony. Any discordant sound that may occur in this performance never fails to disturb the equanimity of the singers, and some minutes will elapse before they resume their song. It would be difficult to draw a correct comparison between the birds and the various instruments they represent. But if the Robin were described as the clarionet, the Bluebird might be considered the flageolet, frequently but not incessantly interspersing a few mellow strains. The Hair-Bird would be the octave flute, constantly trilling on a high key, and the Golden Robin the bugle, often repeating his loud and brief strain. The analogy, if carried further, might lose force and correctness.

All the notes of the Bluebird — his call-notes, his notes of complaint, his chirp, and his song — are equally plaintive and closely resemble one another. I am not aware that this bird utters a harsh note. His voice, which is one of the earliest to be heard in the spring, is associated with the early flowers and with all pleasant vernal influences. When he first arrives he perches upon the roof of a barn or upon some leafless tree, and delivers his few and frequent notes with evident fervor, as if conscious of the pleasures that await him. These mellow notes are all the sounds he makes for several weeks, seldom chirping or scolding like other birds. His song is discontinued at midsummer, but his plaintive call, consisting of a single note pensively modulated, continues every day until he leaves our fields. This sound is one of the melodies of summer's decline, and reminds us, like the note of the green nocturnal tree-hopper, of the ripened harvest, the fall of the leaf, and of all the joyous festivals and melancholy reminiscences of autumn.

The Bluebird builds his nest in hollow trees and posts, and may be encouraged to breed around our dwellings, by supplying boxes for his accommodation. In whatever vicinity we reside, whether in a recent clearing or the heart of a village, if we set up a bird-house in May, it will certainly be occupied by a Bluebird, unless previously taken by a Wren or a Martin. But there is commonly so great a demand for such accommodations, that it is not unusual to see two or three different species contending for one box.

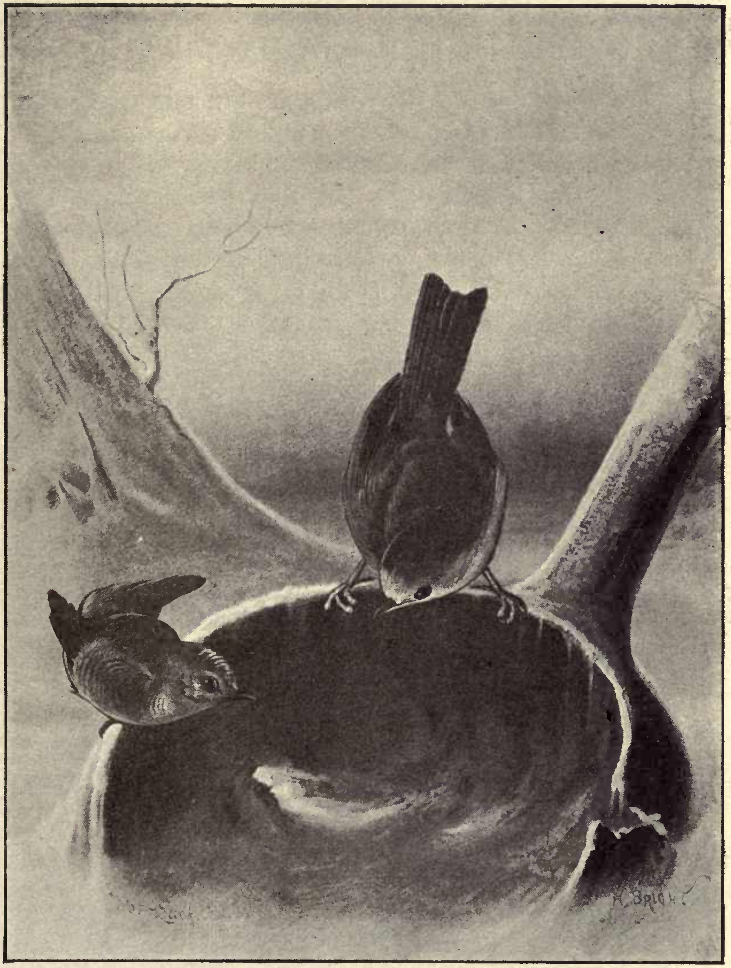
THE HOUSE-WREN.

The bird whose notes serve more than any other species to enliven our summer noondays is the common House-Wren. It is said to breed chiefly in the Middle States, but is very common in our New England villages, and as it extends its summer migration to Labrador, it probably breeds in all places north of the Middle States. It is a migratory bird, leaving us early in autumn, and not reappearing until May. It builds in a hollow tree like the Bluebird. A box of any kind, properly made, will answer its purposes. But nothing is better than a grape-jar, prepared by drilling a hole in its side, just large enough for the Wren, and setting it up on a perpendicular branch sawed off and inserted into the mouth of the jar. The bird fills it with sticks before it makes a nest, and the mouth of the jar serves for drainage.

The Wren is one of the most restless of the feathered tribe. He is continually in motion, and even when singing is constantly flitting about and changing his position. We see him in a dozen places as it were at the same moment; now warbling in ecstasy from the roof of a shed, then, with his wings spread and his feathers ruffled, scolding furiously at a Bluebird or a Swallow that has alighted on his box, or driving a Robin from a neighboring cherry-tree. Instantly we observe him running along a stone-wall and diving down and in and out, from one side to the other, through its openings, with all the nimbleness of a squirrel. He is on the ridge of the barn roof, he is peeping into the dove-cote, he is in the garden under the currant-bushes, or chasing a spider under a cabbage-leaf. Again he is on the roof of a shed, warbling vociferously; and these manœuvres and peregrinations have occupied hardly a minute, so rapid and incessant are all his motions.

The notes of the Wren are very lively and garrulous, and if not uttered more frequently during the heat of the day, are, on account of the general silence of birds, more noticeable at that hour. There is a concert at noonday, as well as in the morning and evening, among the birds; and of the former the Wren is one of the principal musicians. After the hot rays of the sun have silenced the early performers, the Song-Sparrow and the Red-Thrush continue to sing at intervals during the greater part of the day. The Wren is likewise heard at all hours; but when the languishing heat of noon has arrived, the few birds that continue to sing are more than usually vocal, and seem to form a select company. The birds which are thus associated with the Wren are the Bobolink, the Preacher, the Linnet, and the Catbird, if he be anywhere near. If we were at this hour in the woods we should hear the loud, shrill voice of the Oven-Bird and some of the warbling sylvians.

Of all these noonday singers, the Wren is the most remarkable. His song is singularly varied and animated. He has great compass and execution, but wants variety in his tones. He begins very sharp and shrill, like a grasshopper, slides down to a series of guttural notes, then ascends like the rolling of a drum in rapidity of utterance to another series of high notes. Almost without a pause he recommences his querulous insect-chirp, and proceeds through the same trilling and demi-semi-quavering as before. He is not particular about the part of his song which he makes his closing note. He will leave off in the middle of a strain, when he seems in the height of ecstasy, to pick up a spider or a fly. As the Wren produces two broods in a season, his notes are prolonged



WINTER WRENS

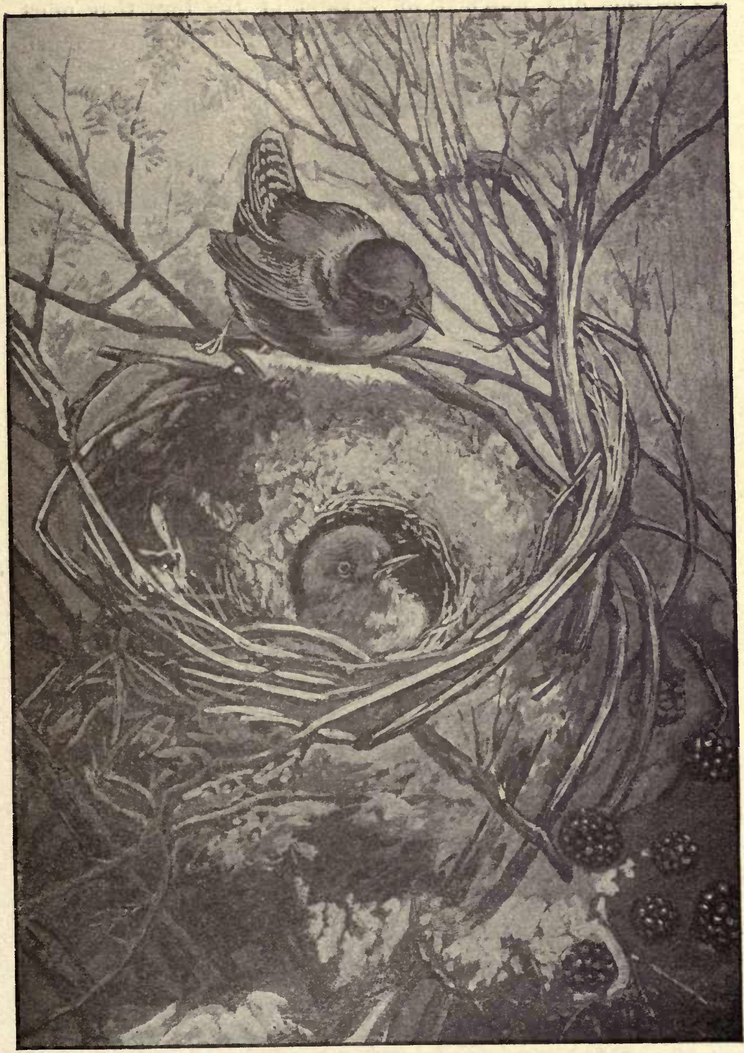
to a late period in the summer, and may be heard sometimes in the third week in August.

THE WINTER-WREN.

We do not often meet with this bird near Boston in summer. He is then a resident of the northern parts of Maine and New Hampshire, and of the Green Mountain range. In the autumn he migrates from the north and may be occasionally seen in company with our other winter birds. In our own latitude, if the cold season drives him farther south, we meet him again early in the spring, making his journey to his northern home. While he remains with us we see him near the shelving banks of rivers, creeping about old stumps of trees, which, half decayed, furnish a frugal share of his dormant insect-food. He is so little afraid of man that he will often leave his native resorts, and may be seen, like our common House-Wren, examining the wood-pile, creeping into the holes of old stone-walls and about the foundations of out-houses. Not having seen this bird except in winter, I am unacquainted with his song. Samuels describes it as very melodious and delightful.

THE MARSH WREN.

I was once crossing by turnpike an extensive meadow which was overgrown with reeds and rushes, when my curiosity was excited by hearing, in a thicket on the banks of a streamlet, a sound that would hardly admit of being described. I could not tell whether it came from an asthmatic bird or an aggravated frog. The sound was unlike anything I had ever heard. I should have supposed, however, if there were Mocking-Birds in our woods, that one of them had concealed himself in the thicket and was attempting to imitate the braying of an ass. I sat down upon the railing of a rustic bridge that crossed the



MARSH WRENS

stream, and watched for a sight of the imp that must be concealed there. In less than a minute there emerged from it a Marsh-Wren, whisking and flitting about with gestures as peculiar though not as awkward as his burlesque song.

If I believed, as some writers affirm, that birds learn their song from their parents, who carry them along from one step to another as if they had a musical gamut before them, I might have conjectured that this bird had been taught by a frog, and that, despising his teacher, he strove not to learn his reptile notes but to burlesque them. As I was walking homeward, I could not but reflect that Nature, who is sometimes personified as an old dame, must have indulged her mirthfulness when she created a bird with the voice of a reptile.

Dr. Brewer describes the nest of the Marsh-Wren as nearly spherical, composed externally of coarse sedges firmly interwoven, cemented with mud and clay, and impervious to the weather. An orifice is left on one side for entrance, having on the upper side a projecting edge to protect it from rain. The inside is lined with soft grass, feathers, and the cottony product of various plants. It is commonly placed on a low bush a few feet from the ground.

This species, like all the Wrens, has great activity and industry, consumes immense quantities of small insects, is very petulant in its manners, and manifests a superior degree of intelligence and courage.

THE PLUMAGE OF BIRDS.

The colors and forms of the plumage of birds are generally regarded as mere accidents, unattended with any advantages in their economy. I cannot believe, however, that they are not in some way, which we cannot fully understand, indispensable to their existence as a species. Let me then endeavor to discover, if possible, the design of Nature in spreading such a variety of tints upon the plumage of birds, and to learn the advantages they derive from these native ornaments. Do they affect the vision of birds with the sensation of beauty, and serve to attract together individuals of the same species? Or are they designed also to protect them from the keen sight of their enemies, while flitting among the blossoms of the trees? It is probable that each of these purposes is subserved by this provision of Nature. She has clothed individuals of the same species and the same sex with uniformity, that they may readily identify their own kindred, and has given them an innate susceptibility to derive pleasure from those colors that predominate in the plumage of their own species. She has likewise distinguished the small birds that live on trees by beautiful colors, while those in general that run upon the ground are marked by neutral tints, that the former may be less easily observed among the blossoms of the trees, and that the latter may be less conspicuous while sitting or running upon the ground.

It is well known that the males of many species are more beautifully and brilliantly decorated than the females, and that the singing-birds in general have less beauty of color than the unmusical species. As an explanation of this fact we must consider that the singing-birds are more humble in their habitats than others. The brightly colored birds chiefly frequent the forests and lofty trees. Such are the woodpecker, the troupial, and many species of tropical birds. The northern temperate latitudes are the region of the grasses, which afford sustenance to a large proportion of the singing-birds — the finches and buntings — of that part of the world. Some of the finches are high-colored, but these usually build in trees, like the purple finch and the goldfinch. But the sparrows and the larks, that build in a bush or on the ground, are plainly dressed. The thrushes, which are equally plain in their dress, build in low bushes, and take their food chiefly from the ground. Indeed, it might be practicable to distinguish among a variety of strange birds the species that live and nestle in trees by their brighter plumage.

In our own latitude the species that frequent the shrubbery are of a brown or olive-brown of different shades. They are dressed in colors that blend with the general tints of the ground and herbage while they are seeking their food or sitting upon their nests. Birds, however, do not differ much in the colors of the hidden parts of their plumage. Beneath they are almost universally of grayish or whitish tints, so that, while sitting on a branch, the reptiles lurking for them may not, when looking upward, distinguish them from the hues of the clouds and the sky and the grayish undersurface of the leaves of trees. Water-birds are generally gray all over, except a tinge of blue in their plumage above. Ducks, however, are many of them variegated with green and other colors that harmonize with the weeds and plants of the shore upon which they feed.

Nature works on the same plan in guarding insects and reptiles from the sight of their foes. Thus, the toad is colored like the soil of the garden, while the colors of the common frog that lives among the green rushes and aquatic mosses are green, and the tree-frog is of a mottled gray, like the outer bark of old trees. Grasshoppers are generally greenish; but there is a species found among the gray lichens on our rocky hills which is the color of the surface of these rocks.

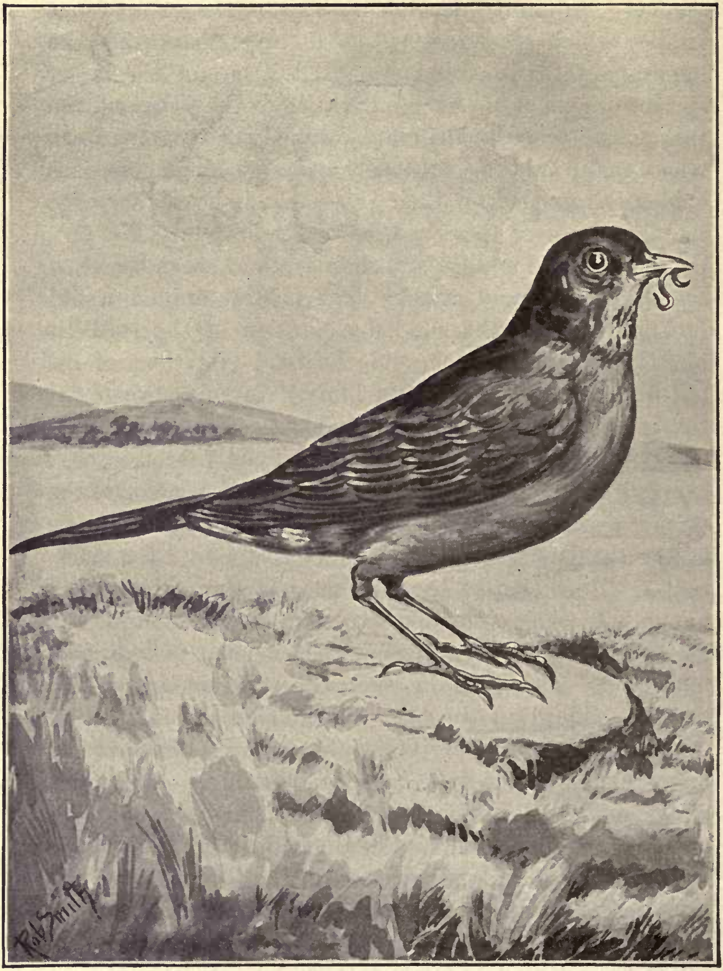
Among the singing-birds of this country which are remarkable for their brilliant colors are the golden oriole, the scarlet tanager, and the American goldfinch. All these species build their nests in trees, and seldom run on the ground. The goldfinch feeds upon the seeds of compound flowers, which are mostly yellow. His plumage of gold and olive allows him to escape the sight of an enemy while picking seeds from the disk of a sunflower or from a cluster of goldenrods.

But why are the females plainly dressed and the males alone adorned with brilliant colors? It may be answered, that, as the female performs the duties of incubation, if she were brightly colored like the male, she would be more readily descried by a bird of prey while sitting on her nest. The male, on the contrary, while hunting among the blossoms and foliage of trees for his insect food, is not so readily distinguished from the flowers, for in temperate latitudes the breeding season is the time when the trees are in blossom. After the young are reared and the flowers have faded, several species dispense with their brilliant colors and assume the plain hues of the female.

We must consider, however, that the beautiful colors of the plumage of the male birds serve to render them more conspicuous objects of attraction to the females. Hence, in the early part of the year, just before the time of courtship arrives, Nature has provided that the plumage of various kinds of birds should suffer a metamorphosis. Thus the bobolink exchanges his winter garment of yellowish-brown for one of brilliant straw-color and black; and the red-winged blackbird casts off his tawny suit for one of glossy jet, with epaulettes of scarlet. What are the useful ends subserved by this mysterious provision of Nature? She clothes them with beauty and endows them with song at a period when their success as lovers depends greatly on the multitude and power of their attractions. Among the beautiful species their success is in proportion to the splendor of their plumage; and among the warblers, to the charms of their voice. Beauty and song are the means Nature has furnished them, whereby they may render themselves, I will not say agreeable, but attractive. I do not suppose a beautiful male bird is preferred to a plain one of the same species; but his beauty causes him to be sooner discovered by an unmated female.

It is easy to explain, therefore, on the principle of compensation, why handsome birds in general are endowed with inferior musical powers. They are able to accomplish by their beauty of plumage what the plainer species do by their songs. It may be observed that the handsome birds, when engaged in courtship, place themselves in attitudes which are calculated to display the full beauty of their plumage; while the songsters under the same circumstances pour forth an unusual strain of melody. The hues of the brightly colored male birds may be a means of assisting their young in identifying them after they have left their nest. They hear, for example, the loud call-note of the golden robin, and immediately they recognize him by his colors, when, if plainly dressed, they might not discover him. As soon as they behold him they commence their chirping and are greeted by the old bird.

There is one numerous tribe of birds that run upon the ground, whose males, except those of a few species, are very brilliantly decorated. This is the gallinaceous family, which are an exception to my remark that the handsome birds inhabit trees. But it is only the larger species or genera of this family, such as the pheasant, the turkey, the peacock, the curassow, and the common fowl, whose males are thus gorgeously arrayed. Their colors are evidently intended for their protection in a peculiar way. All the males of these species are endowed with a propensity to ruffle and expand their feathers whenever they are threatened with attack. The boldest animal would be frightened by the sudden expansion of the brilliant plumage of the peacock, and the loud vibrations of his tail-feathers when he places himself in this strange attitude. A gorgeous spectacle suddenly presented, and so different from anything that is commonly seen, would overawe even the king of beasts. Similar effects in a weaker degree would be produced by the ruffled plumage of the turkey or the pheasant. It is worthy of remark, that in proportion to the brilliancy of the colors is the strength of the impression made upon the sight of the creature that threatens them. The tendency of wild animals to be frightened by such causes is shown by the terror produced in them by the sudden opening of an umbrella. But these brilliant plumes are confined to the larger species of the tribe. Quails, partridges, and grouse are generally colored like the ground, being of a speckled or brownish hue, and are distinguished with difficulty when sitting or standing among the berry-bushes or gleaning their repast in the cornfield. Too small to defend themselves so well as the larger species, their colors are adapted to protect them by concealment, and not by dazzling and alarming their foes.



ROBIN

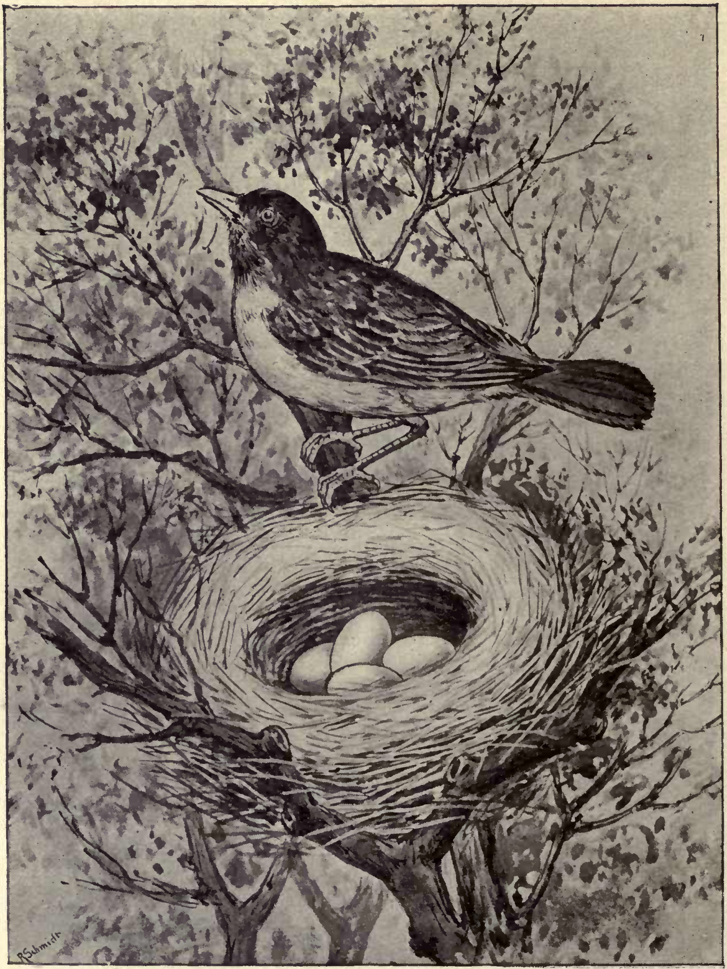
BIRDS OF THE GARDEN AND ORCHARD.

III.

THE ROBIN.

OUR American birds have not been celebrated in classic song. They are hardly well known even to our own people, and have not in general been exalted by praise above their real merits. We read, both in prose and verse, of the European Lark, the Linnet, and the Nightingale, and the English Robin Redbreast has been immortalized in song. But the American Robin is a bird of very different habits. Not much has been written about him as a songster, and he enjoys but little celebrity. He has never been puffed and overpraised, and though universally admired, the many who admire him are fearful all the while lest they are mistaken in their judgment and waste their admiration upon an object that is unworthy of it, — one whose true merits fall short of their own estimate. It is the same want of self-reliance affecting the generality of minds which often causes every man publicly to praise what each one privately condemns, thus creating a spurious public opinion.

I shall not ask pardon of those critics who are always canting about musical "power," and who would probably deny this gift to the Robin, because he cannot gobble like a turkey or squall like a cat, and because with his charming strains he does not mingle all sorts of discords and incongruous sounds, for assigning the Robin a very high rank as a singing-bird. Let them say, in the cant of modern criticism, that his performances cannot be



THE ROBIN S NEST

great because they are faultless. It is enough for me that his mellow notes, heard at the earliest flush of dawn, in the busy hour of noon, or in the stillness of evening, come to the ear in a stream of unqualified melody, as if he had learned to sing from the beautiful Dryad who taught the Lark and the Nightingale. The Robin is surpassed by some other birds in certain qualities of song. The Mocking-Bird has more "power," the Red Thrush more variety, the Bobolink more animation; but there is no bird that has fewer faults than the Robin, or that would be more esteemed as a constant companion, — a vocalist for all hours, whose strains never tire and never offend.

There are thousands who admire the Mocking-Bird, because, after pouring forth a long-continued medley of disagreeable and ridiculous sounds, or a series of two or three notes, repeated more than a hundred times in uninterrupted and monotonous succession, he concludes with a single delightfully modulated strain. He often brings his tiresome extravaganzas to a magnificent climax of melody, and as often concludes an inimitable chant with a most contemptible bathos. But the notes of the Robin are all melodious, all delightful, loud without vociferation, mellow without monotony, fervent without ecstasy, and combining more of sweetness of tone, plaintiveness, cheerfulness, and propriety of utterance than the notes of any other bird.

The Robin is the Philomel of morning twilight in New England and in all the northeastern States of this continent. If his sweet notes were wanting, the mornings would be like a landscape without the rose, or a summer-evening sky without tints. He is the chief performer in the delightful anthem that welcomes the rising day. Of others the best are but accompaniments of more or less importance. Remove the Robin from this woodland orchestra, and it would be left without a *soprano*. Over all the northern parts of this continent, wherever there are human settlements, the Robins are numerous and familiar. There is not an orchard in New England, or in the British Provinces, that is not enlivened by several of these musicians. When we consider the millions thus distributed over this broad country, we can imagine the sublimity of that chorus which from the middle of April until the last of July daily ascends to heaven from the voices of these birds, not one male of which is silent from the earliest dawn until sunrise.

The Robin, when reared in confinement, is one of the most affectionate and interesting of birds. A neighbor and relative of mine kept one twenty years. He would leave his cage frequently, hop about the house and garden and return. He not only repeated his original notes, but several strains of artificial music. Though not prone to imitation, the Robin may be taught to imitate the notes of other birds. I heard a tamed Robin in Tennessee whistle "Over the Water to Charlie," without missing a note. Indeed, this bird is so tractable in his disposition and so intelligent, that I believe he might be taught to sing any simple melody.

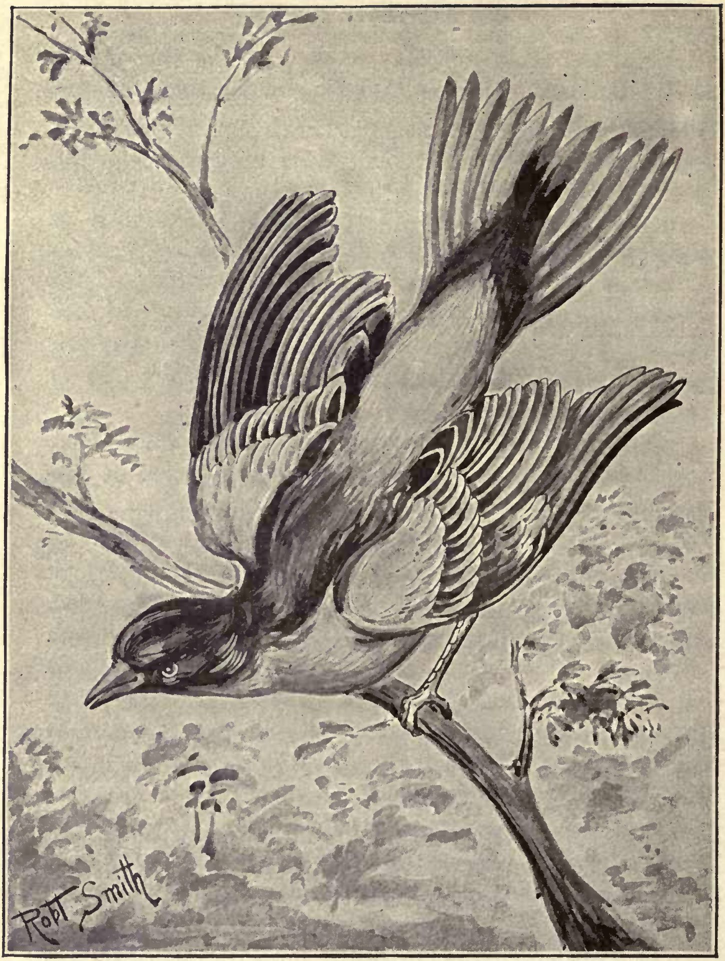
But why should we set any value on his power of learning artificial music? Even if he should perform like a flautist, it would not enhance his value as a minstrel of the grove. We are concerned with the singing-birds only as they are in a state of nature and in their native fields and woods. It is the simplicity of their songs that constitutes their principal charm; and if the different warblers were so changed in their nature as to relinquish their wild notes and sing only tunes, we should listen to them with as much indifference as to the whistling of boys on the road.

THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

About the middle of May, as soon as the cherry-trees are in blossom, and when the oak and the maple are beginning to unfold their plaited leaves, the loud and animated notes of the Golden Robin are first heard in New England. I have never known a bird of this species to arrive before that period. They seem to be governed by the supply of their insect-food, which probably becomes abundant at the same time with the flowering of the orchards. On their arrival they may be observed diligently hunting among the branches and foliage of the trees, making a particular examination of the blossoms for the flies and beetles that are lodged in them.

While the Oriole is thus employed in search of food, which he obtains almost exclusively from trees, he frequently utters his brief but loud and melodious notes. Of this species, the males arrive a few days before the females, and at first utter only a few call-notes, which on the arrival of their mates are lengthened into a song. This seldom consists of more than five or six notes, though the strain is sometimes immediately repeated. Almost all remarkable singing-birds give themselves up entirely to song on their musical occasions, and pay no regard to other demands upon their time until they have concluded. But the Golden Robin never relaxes from his industry, nor remains stationed upon the branch of a tree for the sole purpose of singing. He sings, like an industrious maid-of-all-work, only while employed in his sylvan occupations.

The Baltimore Oriole is said to inhabit North America from Canada to Mexico; but the species are most abundant in the northeastern parts of the continent, and a greater number of them breed in the New England States than either south or west of this section. They are also more

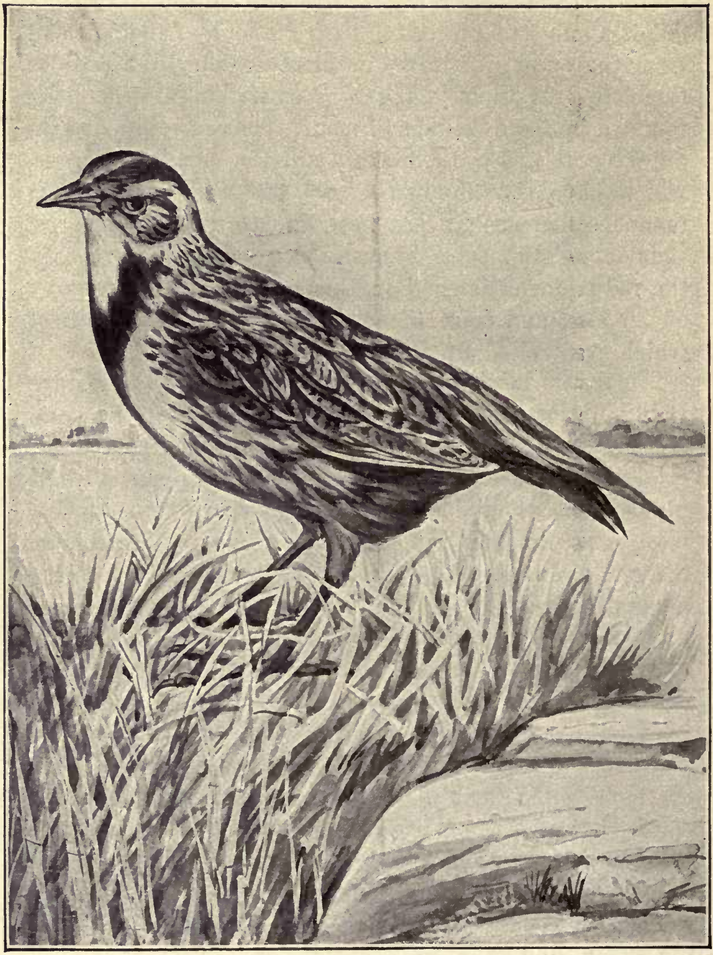


ORIOLE

numerous in villages and in the suburbs of cities than in the wilder regions where there is less tillage. Their peculiar manner of protecting their nests by hanging them from the spray of a tall elm or other lofty tree enables them to rear their young in security, even when surrounded by the dwellings of men. The only animals that are able to reach their nests are the smaller squirrels, which have been known to descend the long slender branches that sustain the nest, and to devour the eggs. This depredation I have never witnessed; but have seen the red squirrel descend in this manner upon the spray of an elm, and seize the chrysalis of a certain insect which was rolled up in a leaf.

The lively motions and general activity of the Golden Robin, no less than his song, render him interesting and attractive. He is remarkable for his vivacity, and his bright colors make all his movements conspicuous. His plumage needs no description, since every one is familiar with it, as its hues are seen like flashes of fire among the green foliage. Associated with these motions are his notes of anger and complaint, which have a peculiar vibratory sound, somewhat harsh, but not unmusical.

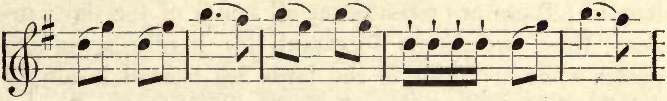
The Golden Robin is said to possess considerable power of musical imitation; but it may be observed that in all his attempts he gives the notes of those birds only whose voice resembles his own. Thus he often repeats the song of the Virginia Redbird. This I do not consider an imitation, but a mere change of his own melody in a slight degree. The few notes of his own song he utters frequently, and with great force and a fine modulation. Sometimes for several days he confines himself to a single strain, and then for about the same length of time he will adopt another. Sometimes he extends his few brief notes into a lengthened melody, and sings as in an ecstasy, like birds of the Finch tribe. Occasionally also



LARK

he sings on the wing, not while hovering over one spot, but while flying from one tree to another. Such musical paroxysms are rare in his case, and seem to be caused by some momentary exultation.

The Golden Robin rears but one brood of young in New England, and his cheerful notes are discontinued soon after they have left their nest. The song of the old bird seems, after this event, hardly necessary as a call-note to the offspring, who keep up an incessant chirping from the moment of leaving their nest until they are able to accompany their parents to the woods. They probably retire to the forest for security, and vary their subsistence by searching for insects that occupy a wilder locality. It is remarkable that after an absence and silence of two or three weeks from the flight of their young the Golden Robins suddenly make their appearance once again for a few days, uttering the same merry notes with which they announced their arrival in May. But this renewal of their song is not continued many days. We seldom see them after the middle of August. They leave for their winter quarters early in autumn.


te-hoo, tee-hoo, te - oo, te-hoo, te-hoo, t - t - t - t, tee-hoo, te - oo.

THE MEADOW-LARK.

This bird is no longer, as formerly, a Lark. Originally an Alauda, he has since been an Oriolus, an Icterus, a Cacicus, and a Sturnus. He has shuffled off all his former identities, and is now a Sturnella magna. I will not enter into a calculation of the metamorphoses he may yet undergo. By the magic charm of some inventor of another new nomenclature; by the ingenuity of some Kant in

Natural History, — if this science be doomed ever to suffer such a curse, when, by the use of new names for every thought of the human mind, we shall all be reduced to a sudden ignorance of everything we once knew, and rendered incapable of talking or writing without constant reference to a new dictionary of terms, — the Meadow-Lark may yet be discovered to be no bird at all, but a mere myth of the meadows.

The Meadow-Lark, though not the "Messenger of Morn" that "calls up the tuneful nations," and though perhaps not properly classed among our singing-birds, has a peculiar lisping note which is very agreeable, and not unlike some of the strains in the song of the English Wood-Lark, as I have heard them from a caged bird. Its notes are heard soon after those of the Robin, the earliest messenger of morn among our singing-birds. They are shrill, drawling, and plaintive, sometimes reminding me of the less musical notes of the Redwing and sometimes of the more musical and feeble song of the Green Warbler. Nuttall very aptly describes its notes by the syllables *et-see-dee-ah*, each one drawled out to a considerable length. These are repeated at all hours of the day; indeed, they are almost incessant, for hardly a minute passes when, if a pair of the birds are located in an adjoining field, you may not hear them. It is the constant repetition of their song that has led gunners to the discovery of the birds, which, if they had been silent, might have escaped notice.

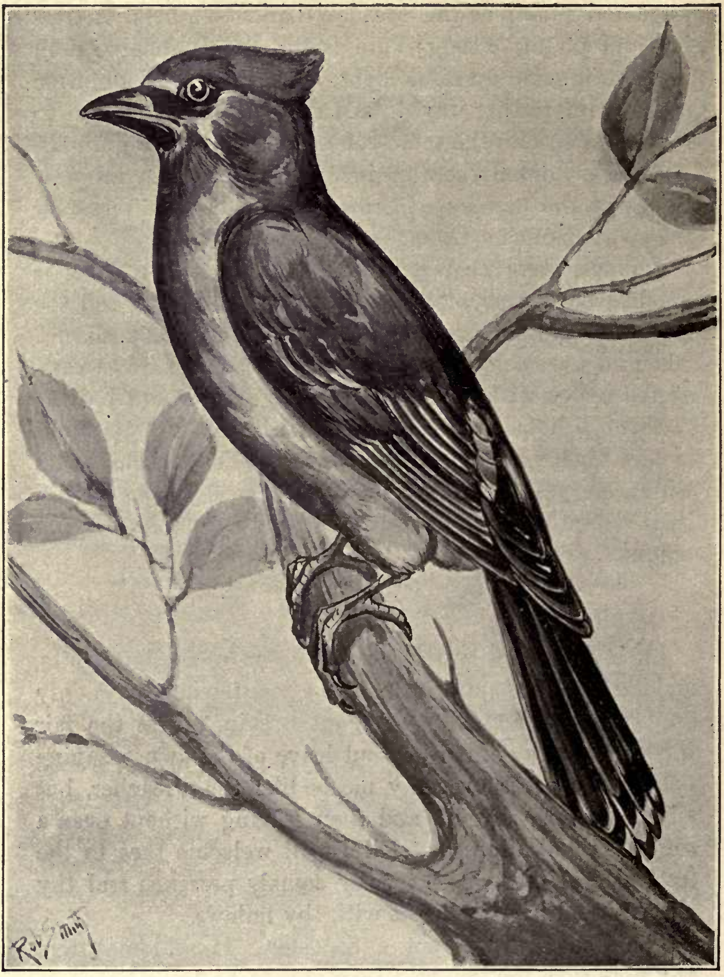
That numerous class of men who would be more enraptured at the sight of "four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a pie" than at the sound of their notes, though they equalled those of the Nightingale, — men who never look upon a bird save with the eyes and disposition of a prowling cat, and who display their knowledge of the feathered race chiefly at the gun-shops, — martial heroes among innocent songsters, — have not overlooked a bird so large and plump as the Meadow-Lark. Vain is its lisping and plaintive song; vain is the beauty displayed in its hovering and graceful flight, in its variegated plumage and its interesting ways! All these things serve but to render its species the more conspicuous mark for gunners, who have hunted them so incessantly that they are now as shy as the persecuted Crow, and as elusive a mark for the sportsman as a Loon.

Samuels says that "usually one bird of a flock is perched on a tree or a fence-post as a sentinel, and the moment a gunner approaches, the bird gives his alarm," when all the flock take wing. The Meadow-Lark is variegated above with different shades of yellow and brown; beneath, a lighter brown speckled with black. Its flight is very graceful, though not vigorous. The motions of its wings are rapid and intermittent, the slight pauses in their vibratory motions giving them a character quite unique.

THE CEDAR-BIRD.

Little bird, that watchest the season of mellow fruits, and makest thy appearance like a guest who comes only on feast-days, and, like a truant urchin, takest the fair products of the garden without leave of the owner, saying not even a grace over thy meals like the Preacher, but silently taking thy fill, and then leaving without even a song of thankfulness, — still I will welcome thee to the festival of Nature, both for thy comely presence and thy cheerful and friendly habit with thy fellows.

The Cedar-Bird is not a songster. It seldom utters any note save the lisp that may always be heard when it is within sight. Dr. Brewer, who kept a wounded one in a cage, mentions that "beside its low, lisping call, this bird had a regular, faint attempt at a song of several low



CHERRY BIRD CEDAR BIRD

notes, uttered in so low a tone that it would be almost inaudible, even at a short distance. It became perfectly contented in confinement, and appeared fond of such members of the family as noticed it." He says of this species as proof of their devotion to one another and their offspring: "Once when one had been taken in a net spread over strawberries, its mate refused to leave it, suffered itself to be taken by the hand in its anxiety to free its mate, and, when set at liberty, would not leave until its mate had also been released and permitted to go with it."

According to Nuttall, during the mating season, they are always caressing each other like Turtle Doves. There is a manifestation of mutual fondness between these social birds. A friend assured him that he had seen one among a row of them seize an insect and offer it to its next neighbor, who passed it to the next, each politely declining the offer, until it had passed backwards and forwards several times.

The Cedar-Bird is not exclusively frugivorous. In the spring and early summer, before the berries are ripe, it feeds wholly upon insects and their larvæ. As a compensation for the mischief done by the bird and its fellows among the fruit-trees, they destroy vast numbers of canker-worms, taking them when they are very small and nestled in the flower-cup of the apple-tree. The excessive multiplication of the canker-worm seems a direct consequence of the proportional diminution of this and a few other valuable though mischievous species. Those cultivators who would gladly extirpate the boys as well as the birds, taking care to save boys enough to kill the birds, might, instead of persecuting the Cedar-Bird, find it more profitable in the end to pay a tax for its preservation.

This bird is very fond of the juniper. Its usual abode is among the junipers. From these, when rambling in the woods, you will often start a flock; for they are easily alarmed on account of the pertinacity with which they have been hunted. It is seldom we see one bird of this species, without at least six or eight more in its company. Their habit of assembling in small flocks renders them more liable to be extirpated; for those who would grudge a charge of powder and shot for the flesh of a single bird are delighted to shoot into a flock, when perhaps six or eight little tender birds will fall to the ground.

The Cedar-Bird is remarkable for the elegance of its shape; and though the colors of its plumage are not brilliant, they are exceedingly fine and delicate. Its general color above is a reddish-brown, slightly tinged with olive; somewhat brighter on the breast, dark in the throat, tail tipped with yellow, forehead with a black line over the eyes, and little scarlet beads upon the outer wing-feathers, resembling dots of red sealing-wax.

THE INDIGO-BIRD.

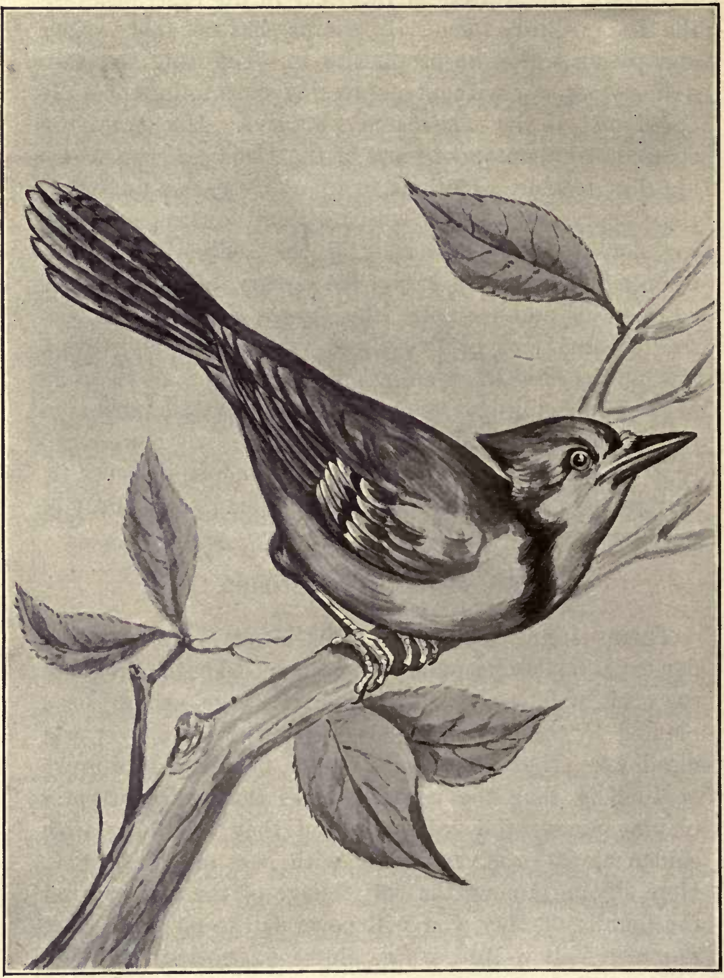
Some of the earliest nests I discovered in my boyhood were those of the Indigo-Bird, of which, for several successive years, there were two or three in a grove of young locust-trees near the building where I attended school. Hence I have always associated this bird with the locust-tree. Every one admires the beauty of the Indigo-Bird,—its plumage of dark-blue, with green reflections when in a certain light. Its color is not that of the Bluebird; but more nearly resembles a piece of indigo, being almost a blue-black. Though it never comes very near our windows, it does not appear to be shy, and it prefers the trees of our gardens and enclosures to those of the forest. When the breeding season is over, the old birds probably retire to the woods; for, after the young have taken flight, they are seldom seen.

I think Mr. Nuttall is incorrect in his description of the Indigo-Bird's song. It certainly has not that variety and pathos which he ascribes to it. The song is rather a lively see-saw without expressing even animation. It ought not to be considered plaintive. His notes are sharp, not unlike those parts of the Canary's song which are disagreeable. I allude to the *sip, sip, sip, sip,* which the Canary intersperses with his more musical and rolling notes. The whole song of the Indigo-Bird is but a repetition of the *sip, sip,* of the Canary, modified by the addition of another note, like *sip-see, sip-see, sip-see, sip-see,* repeated four or five times very moderately, with a few unimportant intervening notes. Neither has the song of the Indigo-Bird so much rapidity as Nuttall ascribes to it. His notes, though not slow, are but little more rapid than those of the Robin. He has the merit, however, of being one of the few of our birds that sing persistently at noonday.

THE SUMMER YELLOW-BIRD.

There is no common feature in our New England domestic landscape more remarkable than the frequent rows of willows which have at different times been planted by the sides of roads where they pass over wet meadows. The air is never sweeter, not even in a grove of lindens, than the vernal breezes that are constantly playing among the willows, when they are hung with golden aments, and swarming with bees and butterflies. Here, flitting among the soft foliage of these trees after the middle of May, you will never fail to meet the little Summer Yellow-Bird, whose plumage is so near the color of the willow-blossoms that they almost conceal it from observation.

The Summer Yellow-Bird is one of that incomparable tribe of warblers, comprehended under the general name



YELLOW BIRD

of sylvians, that frequents familiar places. His plumage is not a bright yellow, but faintly streaked with olive on the back and wings. He feeds entirely on insects, and is frequently seen in gardens among the cherry-trees and currant-bushes in search of them. The birds of this species are not shy; and I have observed the same confiding docility in other small birds which are not persecuted. The note of the male is remarkable only for its sweetness. It is too brief and shrill to attract attention, except by giving notice of the cheerful presence of the bird. He is so familiar as frequently to come up close to our windows when a tree is near, peeping in upon us as if to watch our motions.

There is nothing in his general habits to render him conspicuous; and little is said about him, because he is quiet and unobtrusive. But were his whole species banished from our land, he would be missed as we should miss the little cinqfoil from our green hillsides, which it sprinkles with its modest and familiar flowers, though it attracts no admiration. The Summer Yellow-Bird, like this little flower, dwells sweetly among the willows and cherry-trees, seen by all, and loved for its unpretending beauty, its cheerful note, and its innocent habits.

Dr. Brewer mentions the Summer Yellow-Bird as one of the few species that refuses to hatch the egg of the Cowbird. If this bird should drop one of its eggs into her nest, she builds up the walls and then covers the spurious egg with a thick coating of fresh materials. He mentions one remarkable case that happened in his own garden. The Yellow-Bird had already built a new nest over one Cowbird's egg. Another was deposited in the new nest, and she built over that. She had finally made a nest with three stories, the last one containing only the Yellow-Bird's eggs. This fact and others of a similar kind, related by ornithologists, indicate an unusual share of intelligence in this species. Dr. Brewer also mentions an anecdote related to him by a friend. A pair of Yellow-Birds had built their nest in a low bush, and filled it with eggs, when a storm partly overturned it. They abandoned it and built another in the same bush, and the female laid her eggs and sat upon them. "The narrator then restored the first nest to an upright position and securely fastened it." The male bird immediately sat upon the eggs in this nest, while the female sat upon the other. In this way each one hatched, fed, and reared its separate family.

THE ANTHEM OF MORN.

Nature, for the delight of waking eyes, has arrayed the morning heavens in the loveliest hues of beauty. Fearing to dazzle by an excess of light, she first announces day by a faint and glimmering twilight, then sheds a purple tint over the brows of the rising morn, and infuses a transparent ruddiness throughout the atmosphere. As daylight widens, successive groups of mottled and rosy-bosomed clouds assemble on the gilded sphere, and, crowned with wreaths of fickle rainbows, spread a mirrored flush over hill, grove, and lake, and every village spire is burnished with their splendor. At length, through crimsoned vapors, we behold the sun's broad disk, rising with a countenance so serene that every eye may view him ere he arrays himself in his meridian brightness. Not many people who live in towns are aware of the pleasure attending a ramble near the woods and orchards at daybreak in the early part of summer. The drowsiness we feel on rising from our beds is gradually dispelled by the clear and healthful breezes of early day, and we soon experience an unusual amount of vigor and elasticity. Nature has so ordered her bounties and her blessings as to cause the hour which is consecrated to health to be attended with the greatest number of charms for all the senses; and to make all hearts enamored of the morning, she has environed it with everything, in heaven and on earth, that is delightful to the eye or to the ear, or capable of inspiring some agreeable sentiment.

During the night the stillness of all things is the circumstance that most powerfully attracts our notice, rendering us peculiarly sensitive to every accidental sound that meets the ear. In the morning, at this time of year, on the contrary, we are overwhelmed by the vocal and multitudinous chorus of the feathered tribe. If you would hear the commencement of this grand anthem of nature, you must rise at the very first appearance of dawn, before the twilight has formed a complete semicircle above the eastern porch of heaven. The first note that proceeds from the little warbling host is the shrill chirp of the hair-bird, — occasionally vocal at all hours on a warm summer night. This strain, which is a continued trilling sound, is repeated with diminishing intervals, until it becomes almost incessant. But ere the hair-bird has uttered many notes a single robin begins to warble from a neighboring orchard, soon followed by others, increasing in numbers until, by the time the eastern sky is flushed with crimson, every male robin in the country round is singing with fervor.

It would be difficult to note the exact order in which the different birds successively begin their parts in this performance; but the bluebird, whose song is only a short mellow warble, is heard nearly at the same time with the robin, and the song-sparrow joins them soon after with his brief but finely modulated strain. The different species follow rapidly, one after another, in the chorus, until the whole welkin rings with their matin hymn of gladness. I have often wondered that the almost simultaneous utterance of so many different notes should produce no discords, and that they should result in such complete harmony. In this multitudinous confusion of voices, no two notes are confounded, and none has sufficient duration to grate harshly with a dissimilar sound. Though each performer sings only a few strains and then makes a pause, the whole multitude succeed one another with such rapidity that we hear an uninterrupted flow of music until the broad light of day invites them to other employments.

When there is just light enough to distinguish the birds, we may observe, here and there, a single swallow perched on the roof of a barn or shed, repeating two twittering notes incessantly, with a quick turn and a hop at every note he utters. It would seem to be the design of the bird to attract the attention of his mate, and this motion seems to be made to assist her in discovering his position. As soon as the light has tempted him to fly abroad, this twittering strain is uttered more like a continued song, as he flits rapidly through the air. But at this later moment the purple martins have commenced their more melodious chattering, so loudly as to attract for a while the most of our attention. There is not a sound in nature so cheering and animating as the song of the purple martin, and none so well calculated to drive away melancholy. Though not one of the earliest voices to be heard, the chorus is perceptibly more loud and effective when this bird has united with the choir.

When the flush of morning has brightened into vermilion, and the place from which the sun is soon to emerge has attained a dazzling brilliancy, the robins are already less tuneful. They are now becoming busy in collecting food for their morning repast, and one by one they leave the trees, and may be seen hopping upon the tilled ground, in quest of the worms and insects that have crept out during the night from their subterranean retreats. But as the robins grow silent, the bobolinks begin their vocal revelries; and to a fanciful mind it might seem that the robins had gradually resigned their part in the performance to the bobolinks, not one of which is heard until some of the former have concluded their songs. The little hair-bird still continues his almost incessant chirping, the first to begin and the last to quit the performance. Though the voice of this bird is not very sweetly modulated, it blends harmoniously with the notes of other birds, and greatly increases the charming effect of the combination.

It would be tedious to name all the birds that take part in this chorus; but we must not omit the pewee, with his melancholy ditty, occasionally heard like a short minor strain in an oratorio; nor the oriole, who is really one of the chief performers, and who, as his bright plumage flashes upon the sight, warbles forth a few notes so clear and mellow as to be heard above every other sound. Adding a pleasing variety to all this harmony, the lisping notes of the meadow-lark, uttered in a shrill tone, and with a peculiarly pensive modulation, are plainly audible, with short rests between each repetition.

There is a little brown sparrow, resembling the hair-bird, save a general tint of russet in his plumage, that may be heard distinctly among the warbling host. He is rarely seen in cultivated grounds, but frequents the wild pastures, and is the bird that warbles so sweetly at midsummer, when the whortleberries are ripe, and the fields are beautifully spangled with red lilies. There is no confusion in the notes of his song, which consists of one syllable rapidly repeated, but increasing in rapidity and rising to a higher key towards the conclusion. He sometimes prolongs his strain, when his notes are observed to rise and fall in succession. These plaintive and expressive notes are very loud and constantly uttered, during the hour that precedes the rising of the sun. A dozen warblers of this species, singing in concert, and distributed in different parts of the field, form, perhaps, the most delightful part of the woodland oratorio to which we have listened.

JUNE.

Already do we feel the influence of a more genial sky; a maturer verdure gleams from every part of the landscape, and a prouder assemblage of wild-flowers reminds us of the arrival of summer. The balmy southwest reigns the undisturbed monarch of the weather; the chill breezes rest quietly upon the serene bosom of the deep; and the ocean, as tranquil as the blue canopy of heaven, yields itself to the warm influence of the summer sun, as if it were conscious of the blessing of his beams. The sun rides, like a proud conqueror, over three quarters of the heavens, and, as if delighted with his victory over the darkness, smiles with unwonted complacency upon the beautiful things which are rejoicing in his presence. Twilight refuses to leave the brows of night, and her morning and evening rays meet and blend together at midnight beneath the polar sphere. She twines her celestial rosy wreaths around the bosoms of the clouds, that rival in beauty the terrestrial garlands of summer. The earth and the sky seem to emulate each other in their attempts to beautify the temples of nature and of the Deity; and while the one hangs out her drapery of silver and vermilion over the sapphirine arches of the firmament, the other spangles the green plains and mountains with living gems of every hue, and crowns the whole landscape with lilies and roses.

The mornings and evenings have acquired a delightful temperature, that invites us to rise prematurely from our repose, to enjoy the greater luxury of the balmy breezes.

The dews hang heavily upon the herbage, and the white frosts have gone away to join the procession of the chill autumnal nights. The little modest spring flowers are half hidden beneath the prouder foliage of the flowers of summer; the violets can hardly look upon us from under the broad leaves of the fern; and the anemones, like some little unpretending beauty in the midst of a glittering crowd, are scarcely observed as they are fast fading beneath the shade of the tall shrubbery. The voice of the early song-sparrow and the tender warbling of the bluebird are but faintly audible amidst the chorus of louder musicians; the myriads of piping creatures are silent in the wet places, and the tree-frogs, having taken up their song, make a constant melodious croaking, after nightfall, from the wooded swamps. The summer birds have all arrived; their warbling resounds from every nook and dell; thousands of their nests are concealed in every grove and orchard, among the branches of the trees, or on the ground beneath a tuft of shrubbery; egg-shells, of various hues, are cast out of their nests, and the callow young lie in the open air, exposed to the tender mercies of the genial month of June.

The season of anticipation has passed away; the early month of fruition has come; the hopes of our vernal morning have ripened into realities; we no longer look into the future for our enjoyments, but we revel at length in all those pleasures from which we expected to derive a perfect satisfaction. The month of June is emblematical of the period of life that immediately succeeds the departure of youth, when all our sources of enjoyment are most abundant, and our capacity for higher pleasure has attained maturity, and when the only circumstance that damps our feelings is the absence of that lightness of heart arising from a hopeful looking forward to the future. Our manhood and our summer have arrived.

but our youth and our spring have gone by; and though we have the enjoyment of all we anticipated, yet with the fruition hope begins to languish, for in the present exists the fulness of our joys. The flowery treasures, foretokened by the first blue violet, are blooming around us; the melodious concert, to which the little song-sparrow warbled a sweet prelude in March, is now swelling from a full band of songsters, and the sweet summer climate that was harbored by an occasional south-wind has arrived. But there is sadness in fruition. With all these voluptuous gales and woodland minstrelsies, we cannot help wishing for a renewal of those feelings with which we greeted the first early flower and listened to the song of the earliest returning bird.

Nature has thus nearly equalized our happiness in every season. When our actual joys are least abundant, fancy is near at hand, to supply us with the visions of those pleasures of which we cannot enjoy the substance; filling our souls in spring with the hope of the future, comforting us in autumn with the memory of the past, and amusing us in winter with a tranquil retrospection of the whole year and the pleasant watching for the dawn of another spring.

A total change has taken place in the aspect of the woods since the middle of the last month. The light, yellowish green of the willows and thorns, the purple of the sumach, and the various hues of other sprouting foliage have ripened into a dark uniform verdure. The grass, as it waves in the meadows, gleams like the billows of the ocean; and the glossy surfaces of the ripe leaves of the trees, as they tremble in the wind, glitter like millions of imperfect mirrors in the light of the sun. The petals of the fading blossoms are flying in all directions, as they are scattered by the fluttering gales, and cover, like flakes of snow, the surface of the orchards.

The flowers of innumerable forest-trees are in a state of maturity, and the yellow dust from their flower-cups, scattered widely over the earth, may be seen after showers, covering the edges of the beds of dried water-pools, in yellow circular streaks.

The pines and other coniferous trees are in flower during this month; and the golden hues of their blossoms contrast beautifully with the deep verdure of their foliage. These trees, like others, shed their leaves in autumn; but it is the foliage of the preceding year that falls, leaving that of the last summer still upon the trees. This foliage is very slowly perishable, and covers the earth where it falls, during all the year, with that brown, smooth, and fragrant carpet, which is characteristic of a pine wood. Among the flowers which are conspicuous on this brown matted foliage is the purple lady's-slipper, whose inflated blossoms often burst upon the sight of the rambler, as if they had risen up by enchantment. In similar haunts the trientalis, unrivalled in the peculiar delicacy of its flowers, that issue from a single whorl of pointed leaves, supported upon a tall and slender footstalk, never fails to attract the attention of the botanist and the lover of nature.

Our gardens, during the first of this month, exhibit few exotics more beautiful than the Canadian rhodora, an indigenous shrub, which is at this time in full flower in the wild pastures. It is from two to five feet in height, and its brilliant purple flowers, unrivalled in delicacy, appear on the extremities of the branches, when the leaves are just beginning to unfold. It is rendered singularly attractive by the contrast between its purple hues, of peculiar resplendency, and the whiteness of the flowers of almost all other shrubs, at this season. This plant, by its flowering, marks the commencement of summer, and may be considered an apt symbol of the brilliant month of June.

June is the month of the arethusas, — those charming flowers of the peat-meadows, — belonging to a tribe that is too delicate for cultivation. Like the beautiful birds of the forest, they were created for Nature's own temples; and the divinities of the wood, under whose invisible protection they thrive, will not permit them to join with the multitude that grace the parterre. The cymbidium, of a similar habit, the queen of the meadows, with larger flowers and more numerous clusters; the crimson orchis, that springs up by the river-sides, among the myrtle-like foliage of the cranberry and the nodding panicles of the quaking-grass, like a spire of living flame; and the still more rare and delicate white orchis, that, hidden in deep mossy dells in the woods, seldom feels the direct light of the sun, — are all alike consecrated to solitude and to Nature, as if they were designed to cheer the hearts of her humble votaries with the sight of a thing of beauty that has not been appropriated for the exclusive adornment of the garden and the palace.

The rambler may already perceive a difference in the characters of the flowers of this month and of the last. In May the prominent colors were white and the lighter shades of purple and lilac, in which the latter were but faintly blended. In June the purple shades predominate in the flowers, except those of the shrubs, which are mostly white. The scarlet hues are seldom seen until after midsummer. The yellows seem to be confined to no particular season, being conspicuous in the dandelion, ranunculus, and coltsfoot of spring; in the potentilla, the senecio, and the loosestrife of summer; and in the sunflower, golden-rod, and many other tribes of autumn. Blue is slightly sprinkled through all the seasons.

One of the most charming appearances of the present month, to one who is accustomed to the minute observation of Nature's works, is the flowering of the grasses.

Though this extensive tribe of plants is remarkable in no instances for the brilliancy of its flowers, yet there are few that exhibit more beauty in their aggregations; some rearing their flowers in a compact head, like the herd's-grass and the foxtail; others spreading them out in an erect panicle, like a tree, as the orchard-grass and the common redtop; others appearing with a bristling head, like wheat and barley; and a countless variety of species, with nodding panicles, like the oat and the quaking-grass. The greater number of the gramineous plants are in flower at the present time, and there are no other species, save the flowerless plants, which afford more attractions to those who examine nature with the discriminating eye of science.

He who is accustomed to rambling is now keenly sensible of that community of property in nature, of which he cannot be deprived. The air of heaven belongs equally to all, and cannot be monopolized; but the land is apportioned into tracts belonging to different owners, and the many perhaps do not own a rood. Yet to a certain extent, and in a very important sense, the earth, the trees, the flowers, and the landscape are common property. He who owns a fine garden possesses but little advantage over him who is without one. We are all free in this country to roam over the wide fields and pastures; we can eat of the fruits of the earth, and feast our eyes on the beauties of nature, as well as the owner of the largest domain. A man is not poor who, while he obtains the comforts of life, is thus capable of enjoying the blessings of nature. His property is not circumscribed by fences and boundary lines. All the earth is his garden, — cultivated without expense and enjoyed without anxiety. He partakes of these bounties which cannot be confined to a legal possessor, and which Providence, as a compensation to those who are worn with toil or harassed with care, spreads out to gladden them with renewed hopes and to warm their hearts with gratitude and benevolence.

June is, of all months of the year, the most delightful period of woodland minstrelsy. With the early birds that still continue their warbling, the summer birds have joined their louder and more melodious strains. Early in the morning, when the purple light of dawn first awakens us from sleep, and while the red rays that fringe the eastern arches of the sky with a beautiful tremulous motion are fast brightening into a more dazzling radiance, we hear from the feathered tribe the commencement of their general hymn of gladness. There is first an occasional twittering, then a single performance from some early waker, then a gradual joining of new voices, until at length there is a full chorus of song. Every few minutes some new voice joins in the concert, as if aroused by the beginners and excited by emulation, until thousands of melodious voices seem to be calling us out from sleep to the enjoyment of life and liberty.

After the sun has risen nearly to meridian height, the greater number of the birds that helped to swell the anthem of morn discontinue their songs, and a comparative silence prevails during the heat of the day. The vireo, however, warbles incessantly, at all hours of daylight, from the lofty tree-tops in the heart of the villages; the oriole is still piping at intervals among the blossoms of the fruit-trees; and the merry bobolink never tires during the heat of the day, while singing and chattering, as in ecstasy, above and around the sitting-place of his wedded mate. At the hour of the sun's decline the birds renew their songs; but the more familiar species that linger about our orchards and gardens are far less musical at sunset than at sunrise.

BIRDS OF THE PASTURE AND FOREST.

I.

He who has always lived in the city or its suburbs, who has seldom visited the interior except for purposes of trade, and whose walks have not often extended beyond those roads which are bordered on each side by shops and dwelling-houses, may never have heard some of our most remarkable songsters. These are the birds of the pasture and forest, those shy, melodious warblers who sing only in the ancient haunts of the Dryads. These birds have not multiplied like the familiar birds in the same proportion with the increase of human population and the extension of agriculture. Though they do not shun mankind, they keep aloof from villages, living chiefly in the deep wood or on the edge of the forest and in the bushy pasture.

There is a peculiar wildness in the songs of this class of birds that awakens a delightful mood of mind, similar to that which is excited by reading the figurative lyrics of a romantic age. This feeling is undoubtedly, to a certain extent, the effect of association. Having always heard their notes in wild and wooded places, they never fail to bring this kind of scenery vividly before the imagination, and their voices are like the sounds of mountain streams. It is certain that the notes of the solitary birds do not affect us like those of the Robin and the Linnet; and their influence is the same, whether it be attributable to some intrinsic quality or to association, which is indeed the source of some of the most delightful emotions of the human soul.

Nature has made all her scenes and the sights and sounds that accompany them more lovely by causing them to be respectively suggestive of a peculiar class of sensations. The birds of the pasture and forest are not frequent enough in cultivated places to be associated with our homes and our gardens. Nature has confined certain species of birds and animals to particular localities, and thereby gives a poetic or picturesque attraction to their features. There are certain flowers that cannot be cultivated in a garden, as if they were designed for the exclusive adornment of those secluded arbors which the spade and the plough have never profaned. Here flowers grow which are too holy for culture, and birds sing whose voices were never heard in the cage of the voluptuary, and whose tones inspire us with a sense of freedom known only to those who often retire from the world to live in religious communion with nature.

THE SWAMP-SPARROW.

There is a little Sparrow whose notes I often hear about the shores of unfrequented ponds, and from their untrodden islets covered with button-bush and sweet gale, and never in any other situations. The sound of his voice always enhances the sensation of rude solitude with which I look upon this primitive scenery. We often see him perched upon the branch of a dead tree that stands in the water, a few rods from the shore, apparently watching our angling operations from his leafless perch, where he sings so sweetly that the very desolation of the scene borrows a charm from his voice that renders every object delightful.

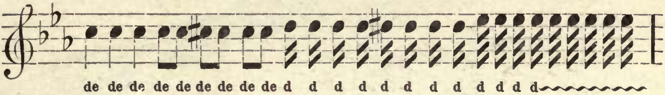
This little solitary warbler is the Swamp-Sparrow. He bears some resemblance to the Song-Sparrow, but he is without that bird's charming variety of modulation. His notes have a peculiar liquid tone, and sometimes resemble the rapid dropping of water by the single drop into a wooden cistern which is half full. They may be compared to the trilling of the Hair-Bird, a kindred species, less rapidly uttered, and upon a lower key. If their notes are not plaintive, as Nuttall considered them, they produce very vividly a sensation of solitude, that tempts you to listen long and patiently, as to a sweet strain in some rude ballad music.

THE WOOD-SPARROW.

When the flowers of early summer are gone, and the graceful neottia is seen in the meadows, extending its spiral clusters among the nodding grasses; when the purple orchis is glowing in the wet grounds, and the roadsides are gleaming with the yellow blossoms of the hypericum, the merry voice of the Bobolink has ceased and many other familiar birds have become silent. At this time, if we stroll away from the farm and the orchard into more retired and wooded haunts, we may hear at all hours and at frequent intervals the pensive and melodious notes of the Wood-Sparrow, who sings as if he were delighted at being left almost alone to warble and complain to the benevolent deities of the grove. He who in his youth has made frequent visits to these pleasant and solitary places, among the thousands of beautiful and sweet-scented flowers that spring up among the various spicy and fruit-bearing shrubs that unite to form a genuine whortleberry-pasture, — he only knows the unspeakable delights which are awakened by the sweet, simple notes of this little warbler.

The Wood-Sparrow is somewhat smaller than a Canary, with a pale chestnut-colored crown, above of a brownish hue, and dusky-white beneath. Though he does not seem to be a shy bird, I have never seen him in our gardens. The inmates of solitary cottages alone are privileged to hear his notes from their windows. He loves the plains and the hillsides which are half covered with a primitive growth of young pines, junipers, cornels, and whortleberry-bushes, and lives upon the seeds of grasses and wild lettuce, with occasional repasts of insects and fruits. His notes are mellow and plaintive, and, though often prolonged to a considerable length, seldom consist of more than one strain. He begins slowly and emphatically, as if repeating the syllable *de, de, de, de,* any number of times, increasing in rapidity, and at the same time sliding upward, by almost imperceptible gradations, about one or two tones on the musical scale.

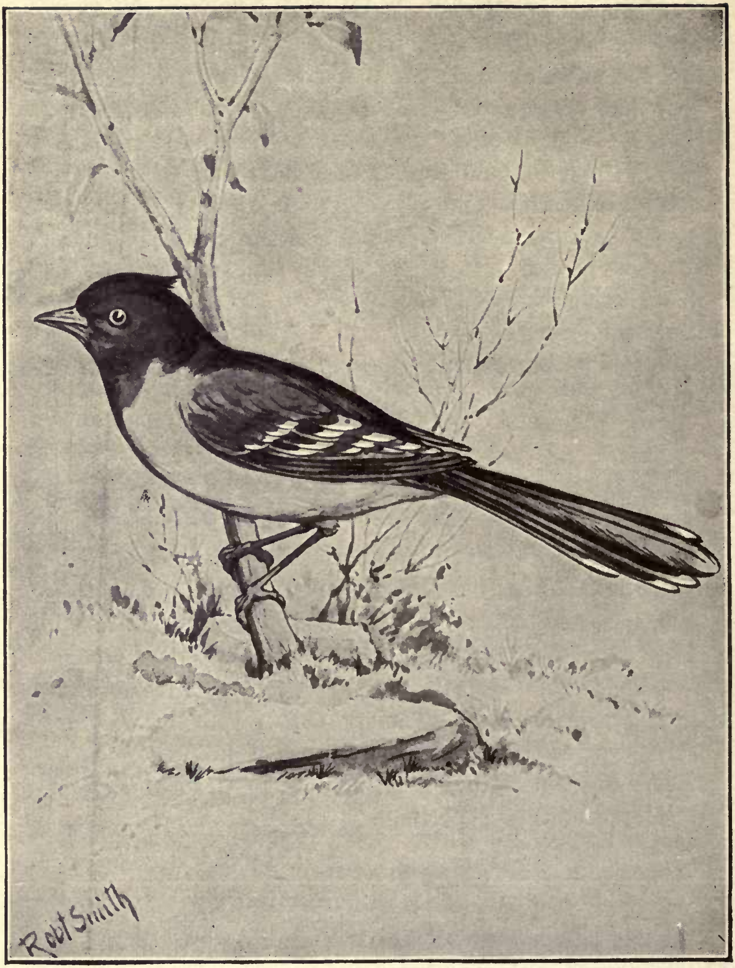
WOOD-SPARROW'S SONG.



In the latter part of June, when this bird is most musical, he occasionally varies his song, by uttering a few chirps after the first strain, like the Canary, then recommencing it, and repeating it thus perhaps three or four times. I once heard a Canary that repeated this reiterated song of the Wood-Sparrow, and it seemed to me to surpass any notes I had ever heard before from this sweet little domesticated songster.

THE GROUND-ROBIN OR CHEWINK.

While listening to the notes of the Wood-Sparrow, we are constantly saluted by the agreeable, though less musical, notes of the Ground-Robin, an amusing little bird that confines himself chiefly to the edges of woods. This bird is elegantly spotted with white, red, and black, the

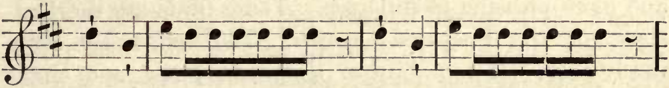


GROUND ROBIN OR CHEWINK

female being of a bright bay color where the male is red. Every rambler knows him, not only by his plumage and his peculiar note, but also by his singular habit of lurking among the bushes, appearing and disappearing like a squirrel, and watching all our movements. It is with difficulty that a gunner can obtain a good aim at him, so rapidly does he change his position among the leaves and branches. In these motions he resembles the Wren. When he perceives that we are observing him he pauses in his song, and utters that peculiar note of complaint from which he has derived the name Chewink. The sound is more like *chewee,* accenting the second syllable.

The Chewink is a very constant singer during four months of the year, from the first of May. He is untiring in his lays, seldom resting for any considerable time from morn to night, being never weary in rain or in sunshine, or at noonday in the hottest weather of the season. His song consists of two long notes, the first about a third above the second, and the last part made up of several rapidly uttered liquid notes, about one tone below the first note.

SONG OF THE CHEWINK.



There is an expression of great cheerfulness in these notes, though they are not delivered with much enthusiasm. But music, like poetry, must be somewhat plaintive in its character to take strong hold of the feelings. I have never known any person to be affected by these notes as many are by those of the Wood-Sparrow. While employed in singing, the Chewink is usually perched on the lower branch of a tree, near the edge of a wood, or on the summit of a tall bush. He is a true forest bird, and builds his nest upon the ground in the thickets that conceal the boundaries of the wood.

The note of the Chewink and his general appearance and habits are well adapted to render him conspicuous, and to cause him to be known and remembered, while the Wood-Sparrow and the Veery might remain unobserved. Our birds are like our "men of genius." As in the literary world there is a description of mental qualities which, though of a high order, must be pointed out by an observing few before the multitude can appreciate them, so the sweetest songsters of the wood are unknown to the mass of the community, while many ordinary performers, whose talents are conspicuous, are universally known and admired.

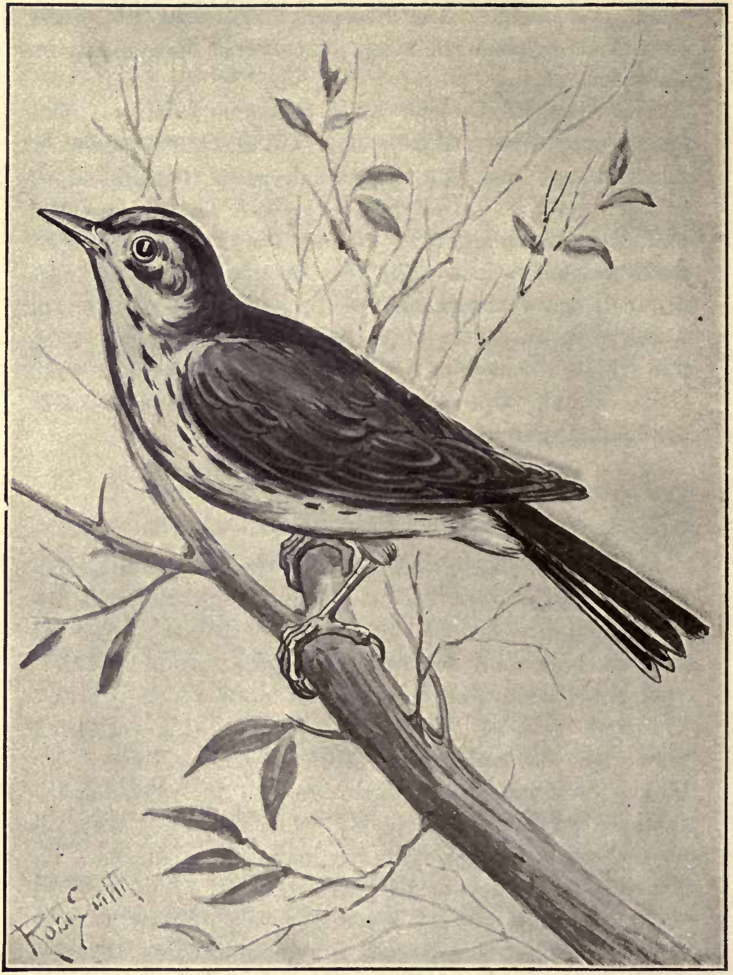
THE REDSTART AND SPECKLED CREEPER.

As we advance into the wood, if it be midday, or before the decline of the sun, the notes of two small birds will be sure to attract our attention. The notes of the two are very similar and as slender and fine as the chirp of a grasshopper, being distinguished from it only by a different and more pleasing modulation. These birds are the Redstart and the Speckled Creeper. The first is the more rarely seen. It is a bird of the deep forest, and shuns observation by hiding itself in some of the obscure parts of the wood. Samuels, however, has known a nest of the Redstart to be built and the young reared in a garden, and other authors consider the bird more familiar than shy. In general markings, that is, as we view the bird without particular examination, the Redstart is like the Chewink, though not more than half its size. It lives entirely on insects, darting out upon them from its perch like a flycatcher, and searching the foliage for them like a sylvian. Its song is similar to that of the Summer Yellow-Bird, so common in our gardens among the fruit-trees, but more shrill and feeble. The Creeper's note does not differ from it more than the notes of different individuals of the same species.

The Speckled Creeper takes its name from its habit of creeping like a Woodpecker round the branches of trees, feeding upon the insects and larvæ that are lodged in the crevices of the bark. It often leaves the wood and diligently manœuvres among the trees in our gardens and enclosures. The constant activity of the birds of this species affords proof of the myriads of insects that must be destroyed by them in the course of one season, and which, if not kept in check by these and other small birds, would, by their multiplication, render the earth uninhabitable by man.

THE OVEN-BIRD.

While listening to the slender notes of these little sylvians, hardly audible amidst the din of grasshoppers, the rustling of leaves, and the sighing of winds among the tall oaken boughs, suddenly the space resounds with a loud, shrill song, like the sharpest notes of the Canary. The little warbler that startles us with this vociferous note is the Golden-crowned Thrush or Oven-Bird. This bird is confined almost exclusively to the woods, and is particularly partial to noonday, when he sings. There is no melody in his lay. He begins rather moderately, increasing in loudness as he proceeds, until his note seems to fill the whole wood. He might be supposed to utter the words *I see, I see, I see, I see,* emphasizing the first word, and repeating the two five or six times, growing louder and louder with each repetition. There is not a bird in the wood that equals this little piper in the energy with which he delivers his brief communication. His



OVEN-BIRD

notes are associated with summer noondays in the deep woods, and when bursting upon the ear in the silence of noon, they disperse all melancholy thoughts as if by enchantment.

Samuels says he has listened to the song of this bird at all hours of the night, in the mating and incubating season. The bird seems to soar into the air, and to sing while hovering in a slow descent. He has noticed the same habit in the Maryland Yellow-Throat. Dr. Brewer says the Oven-Bird "has two very distinct songs, each in its way remarkable." I have noticed that many species of birds are addicted occasionally to a kind of soliloquizing; warbling in a low tone, not very audibly and apparently for their own amusement. It is seldom that these soliloquizing notes bear any resemblance to the usual song of the bird; and I have heard them from the Chickadee and other birds that have no song.

The oven-shaped nest of this bird has always been an object of curiosity. It is placed upon the ground under a knoll of moss, or a tuft of weeds and bushes, and is neatly woven of long grass and fibrous roots. It is covered with a roof of the same materials, and a round opening is made at the side for entrance. The nest is so ingeniously covered with grass and assimilated to the surface around it, that it is not easily discovered. But it is said that the Cowbird is able to find it, and uses it as a depository for its eggs.

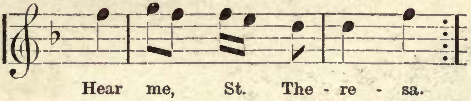
THE GREEN WARBLER.

Those who are accustomed to rambling in the forest may have observed that pine woods are remarkable for certain collections of mosses which have cushioned a projecting rock or the decayed stump of a tree. When weary with heat and exercise, it is delightful to sit down upon one of these green velveted couches and take note of the objects immediately around us. We are then prepared to hear the least sound that pervades our retreat. Some of the sweetest notes ever uttered in the wood are distinctly heard only at such times; for when we are passing over the rustling leaves, the noise made by our progress interferes with the perfect recognition of all delicate sounds. It was when thus reclining, after half a day's search for flowers, under the grateful shade of a pine-tree, now watching the white clouds that sent a brighter daybeam into those dark recesses as they passed luminously overhead; then noting the peculiar mapping of the ground underneath the wood, diversified with mosses in swelling knolls, little islets of fern, and parterres of ginsengs and Solomon's-seals, I was first greeted by the pensive note of the Green Warbler, as he seemed to utter in supplicating tones, very slowly modulated, *Hear me, St. Theresa!* This strain, as I have observed many times since, is at certain hours repeated constantly for ten minutes at a time; and it is one of those melodious sounds that seem to belong exclusively to solitude.

Though these notes of the Green Warbler may be familiar to all who are accustomed to strolling in the wood, the bird is known to but few persons. Some birds of this species are constant residents during summer in the woods of Eastern Massachusetts, but the greater number retire farther north in the breeding season. Nuttall remarks of the Green Warbler: "His simple, rather drawling, and somewhat plaintive song, uttered at short intervals, resembles the syllables *te, de, deritsea*, pronounced pretty loud and slow, the tones proceeding from high to low. In the intervals, he was particularly busied in catching small cynips and other kinds of flies, keeping up a smart snapping of his bill, almost similar to the noise made by knocking pebbles together."

There is a plaintive expression in this musical supplication that is apparent to all who hear it, no less than if the bird were truly offering prayers to some tutelary deity. It is difficult to determine why a certain combination of sounds should affect one with an emotion of sadness, while another, under the same circumstances, produces a feeling of joy. This is a part of the philosophy of music which has not been explained.

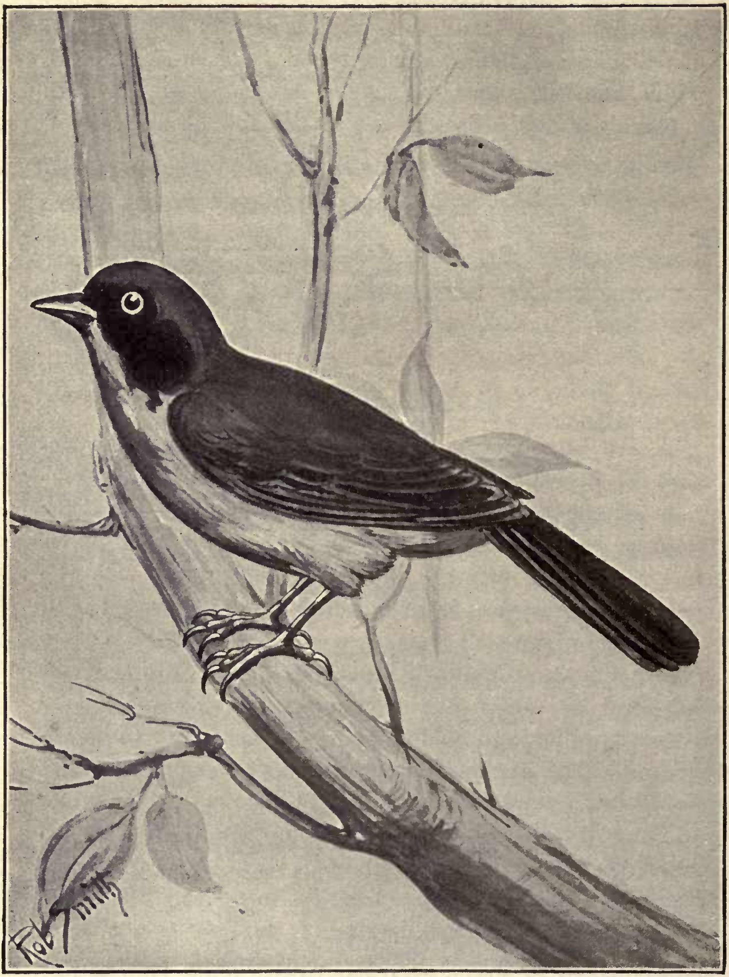
SONG OF THE GREEN WARBLER.



THE MARYLAND YELLOW-THROAT.

As we leave the forest and emerge into the open pasture, we hear a greater number of birds than in the darkness of the wood. More sounds are awake of every description, not only those of a busy neighboring population, but of domestic birds and quadrupeds. On the outside of the wood, if the ground be half covered with wild shrubs, you will hear often repeated the lively song of the Maryland Yellow-Throat. Like the Summer Yellow-Bird, he is frequently seen among the willows; but he is less familiar, and seldom visits the garden or pleasure-ground. The angler is startled by his notes on the rushy borders of a pond, and the botanist listens to them while peeping into some woodland hollow or bushy ravine. Even the woodcutter is delighted with his song, when, sitting upon a new-fallen tree, he hears the little bird from a near cornel-bush, saying, *I see, I see you, I see, I see you, I see, I see you.* These notes are not unlike those of the Brigadier, and are both lively and agreeable.

In its plumage the Yellow-Throat is very attractive. It is of a bright olive-color above, with a yellow throat



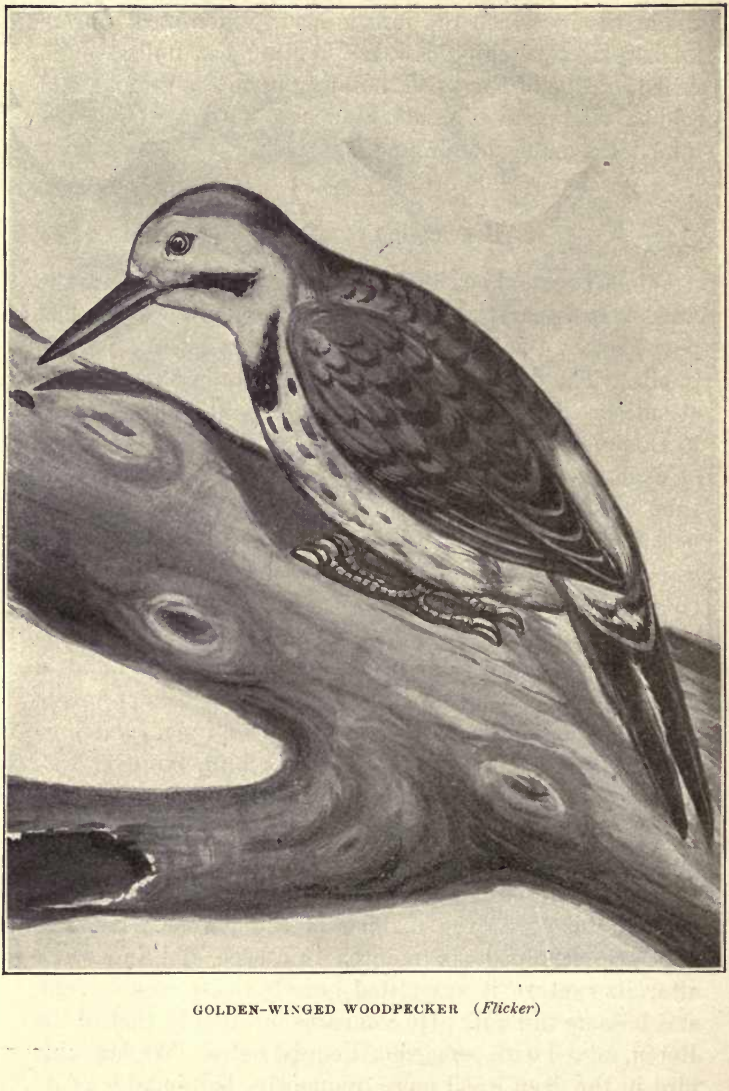
MARYLAND YELLOW THROAT

and breast, and a black band extending from the nostrils over the eye. The black band and the yellow throat are the marks by which the bird is readily identified. From its habits of perching low, frequenting the undergrowth near the edge of the wood, building upon the ground, and seldom visiting the higher branches of trees, it has obtained the name of Ground Warbler.

THE SCARLET TANAGER.

When I was about seven years of age I first saw the Scarlet Tanager, lying dead in a heap of birds which had been shot by two Spaniards, who were my father's private pupils. The fine plumage of this bird soon attracted my attention. But it was long before I could feel reconciled to this slaughter, though delighted with the opportunity of examining the different birds in the heap. Since that time I have often found the Scarlet Tanager in the game-bags of young sportsmen; but I have seldom seen in the woods more than two or three birds of this species in any one season.

Low grounds and oaken woods are the Tanager's favorite habitats. It nestles in the deep forest, and builds a loosely constructed nest of soft grass and slender brush, forming a shallow basket which is lodged upon some horizontal bough of oak or pine. This bird, however, displays no skill as a basket-maker, hardly surpassing even the Turtle-Dove as an architect. The eggs are speckled on a ground of dull pea-green. The male Tanager sings with considerable power a sort of interrupted song, modulated a little after the manner of the Thrush. Samuels kept one confined six months in a cage, and in a week after its capture it submitted quietly to its confinement, and became tuneful. He compares its song to that of the Robin, mixed with some ventriloquial notes. We hear this bird in the deep wood more frequently than outside of it.



GOLDEN-WINGED WOODPECKER (*Flicker*)

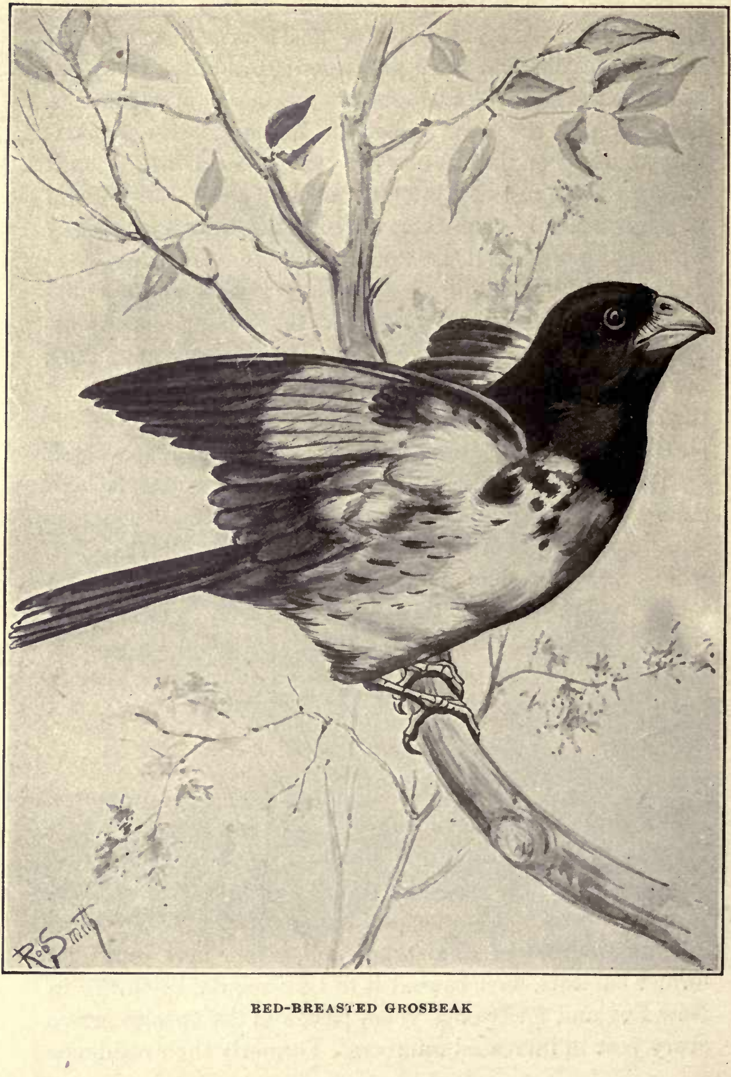
THE FLICKER.

We are all familiar with the notes of this Woodpecker, that resemble the call-notes of the common Robin, but they are louder and more prolonged. Audubon compares them to the sounds of laughter when heard at a distance. According to the same writer the males woo the females very much after the manner of our common Doves. They build in holes in trees, but you never see them climbing a tree like other Woodpeckers. They take their food chiefly from the ground, and devour great quantities of ants.

The Flicker, though not attractive when seen at a distance, is found to have very beautiful plumage on examination. On the back and wings it is chiefly of a light brown, with black bands on the wing-feathers, giving them a kind of speckled appearance; a scarlet crescent on the back of the head, and a similar shaped black patch on the throat. The under surface of the wings is of a golden yellow. Hence it is sometimes called the Golden-winged Woodpecker. Samuels relates that if the eggs, which are of a pure white, be removed from the nest while the bird is laying, she will continue to lay like a common hen. He has known this experiment to be tried until the bird had laid eighteen or twenty eggs, though her usual number is but six.

THE ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK.

We must pass out of the woods again, where we can bask in the sunshine, and obtain a view of fields and farms, to hear the voice of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak. This bird was not an acquaintance of my early years. Certain changes of climate or soil, either here or in its former habitats, have caused it to be a regular sojourner in New England for twenty years past, and the species arrive every year in increased numbers. Formerly their residence



RED-BREASTED GROSBEAK

was chiefly confined to the Middle States. Now we may see them frequently every summer, but not in familiar places or in those which are very solitary. I have seen them many times in Medford woods, and in those near Fresh Pond in Cambridge, and in Essex County.

The first time I heard the note of the Grosbeak I mistook it for the song of the Golden Robin, prolonged, varied, and improved in an unusual degree. I soon, however, discovered the bird, and thought his lively manners, no less than his brilliant notes, were like those of the Golden Robin. His song is greatly superior to that of the Redbird or Cardinal Grosbeak, which is only a repetition of two or three sweet notes, like *che-hoo, che-hoo, che-hoo,* rapidly delivered, the last note of each two about a third lower than the first. In the South he is joined by the Mocking-Bird, which all day tiresomely repeats these notes of the Cardinal.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is classed among our nocturnal songsters by those who are familiar with its habits. Samuels has heard it frequently in the night, and says of its song that it is "a sweet warble with various emphatic passages, and sometimes a plaintive strain exceedingly tender and affecting." This description seems to me very beautiful and accurate. Mr. S. P. Fowler thinks this bird is not heard so frequently by night as by day, though it often sings in the light of the moon. The moon, indeed, seems to be the source of inspiration to all nocturnal songsters. Though I once mistook the song of this Grosbeak for that of the Golden Robin, lately I have thought it more like the native song of the Mocking-Bird, and not inferior to it in any respect. He utters but few plaintive notes. They are mostly cheerful, melodious, and exhilarating. They are modulated somewhat like those of the Purple Finch, delivered more loudly and with a great deal more precision.

PLEA FOR THE BIRDS.

In the beginning, according to the testimony of the "Wisdom of Solomon," all things were ordered in measure, number, and weight. The universe was balanced according to a law of harmony no less wise than beautiful. There was no deficiency in one part or superfluity in another. As time was divided into seasons and days and years, the material world was arranged in such a manner that there should be a mutual dependence of one kingdom upon another. Nothing was created without a purpose, and all living things were supplied with such instincts and appetites as would lead them to assist in the great work of progression. The kingdoms of nature must ever remain thus perfectly adjusted, except for the interference of man. He alone, of all living creatures, has power to turn the operations of nature out of their proper course. He alone is able to transform her hills into fortifications and to degrade her rivers to commercial servitude. Yet, while he is thus employed in revolutionizing the surface of the earth, he might still work in harmony with nature's designs, and end in making it more beautiful and more bountiful than in its pristine condition.

In the wilderness we find a certain adjustment of the various tribes of plants, birds, insects, and quadrupeds, differing widely from that which prevails over a large extent of cultivated territory. In the latter, new tribes of plants are introduced by art, and nature, working in harmony with man, introduces corresponding tribes of insects, birds, and quadrupeds. Man may with impunity make a change of the vegetable productions, if he but allows a certain freedom to Nature in her efforts to supply the balance which he has disturbed. While man is employed in restocking the earth with trees and vegetables, Nature endeavors to preserve her harmony by a new supply of birds and insects. A superabundance of either might be fatal to certain tribes of plants. I believe the insect races to be as needful in the order of creation as any other part of Nature's works. The same may be said of that innumerable host of plants denominated weeds. But while man is endeavoring to keep down superfluities, he may, by working blindly, cause the very evil he designs to prevent. It is not easy to check the multiplication of weeds and insects. These, in spite of all direct efforts to check them, will increase beyond their just mean. This calamity would not happen if we took pains to preserve the feathered tribes, which are the natural checks to the multiplication of insects and weeds. Birds are easily destroyed: some species, indeed, are already nearly exterminated; and all are kept down to such a limit as to bear no just proportion to the quantity of insects that supply them with food.

Although birds are great favorites with man, there are no animals, if we except the vermin that infest our dwellings, that suffer such unremitted persecution. They are everywhere destroyed, either for the table or for the pleasure of the chase. As soon as a boy can shoulder a gun, he goes out, day after day, in his warfare of extermination against the feathered race. He spares the birds at no season and in no situation. While thus employed, he is encouraged by older persons, as if he were ridding the earth of a pest. Thus do men promote the destruction of one of the blessed gifts of Nature.

If there be proof that any race of animals was created for the particular benefit of mankind, this may certainly be said of birds. Men in general are not apt to consider how greatly the sum of human happiness is increased by certain circumstances of which they take but little note. There are not many who are in the habit of going out of their way or pausing often from their labors to hear the song of a bird or to examine the beauty of a flower. Yet the most indifferent would soon experience a painful emotion of solitude, were the feathered race to be suddenly annihilated, or were vegetation to be deprived of everything but its leaves and fruit. Though we may be accustomed to regard these things as insignificant trifles, we are all agreeably affected by them. Let him who thinks he despises a bird or a flower be suddenly cast ashore upon some desert island, and after a lonely residence there for a season, let one of our familiar birds greet him with a few of its old accustomed notes, or a little flower peep out upon him with the same look which has often greeted him by the wayside in his own country, and how gladly would he confess their influence upon his mind!

But there is a great deal of affectation of indifference toward these objects that is not real. Children are delighted with birds and flowers; women, who have in general more culture than men, are no less delighted with them. It is a common weakness of men who are ambitious to seem above everything that pleases women and children to affect to despise the singing of a bird and the beauty of a flower. But even those who affect this indifference are not wholly deaf or blind. They are merely ignorant of the influence upon their own minds of some of the chief sources of our pleasures.

It is not entirely on account of their song, their beauty, and their interesting habits, that we set so high a value upon the feathered tribes. They are important in the general economy of Nature, without which the operation of her laws would be disturbed, and the parts in the general harmony would be incomplete. As the annihilation of a planet would produce disturbance in the motions of the spheres, and throw the celestial worlds out of their balance, so would the destruction of any species of birds create confusion among terrestrial things. Birds are the chief and almost the only instruments employed by Nature for checking the multiplication of insects which otherwise would spread devastation over the whole earth. They are always busy in their great work, emigrating from place to place, as the changes of the seasons cut off their supplies in one country and raise them up in another. Some, like the swallow tribe, seize them on the wing, sailing along the air with the velocity of the winds, and preserving it from any excess of the minute species of atmospheric insects. Others, like the creepers and woodpeckers, penetrate into the wood and bark of trees, and dislodge the larvæ before they emerge into the open air. Beside these birds that do their work by day, there are others, like the whippoorwill tribe, that keep their watch by night, and check the multiplication of moths, beetles, and other nocturnal insects.

Man alone, as I have before remarked, can seriously disturb the operations of Nature. It is he who turns the rivers from their courses, and makes the little gurgling streams tributary to the sluggish canal. He destroys the forests, and exterminates the birds after depriving them of their homes. But the insects, whose extreme minuteness renders them unassailable by his weapons, he cannot destroy, and Nature allows them to multiply and become a scourge to him, as if in just retribution for his cruelty to the feathered races who are his benefactors.

JULY.

THE month of balmy breezes and interminable verdure has given place to one of parching heat and sunshine, which has seared the verdant brows of the hills, and driven away the vernal flowers that crowned their summits. They have fled from the uplands to escape the heat and drought, and have sought shelter in wet places or under the damp shade of woods. Many of the rivulets that gave animation to the prospect in the spring are now marked only by a narrow channel, filled with a luxuriant growth of herbs, that follow its winding course along the plain; and the shallow pools that watered the early cowslips are turned into meads of waving herbage. Millions of bright flowers are nodding their heads over the tall grass, but we scarcely heed them, for they seem like the haughty usurpers of the reign of the meeker flowers of spring. The cattle have taken shelter under the trees to escape the hot beams of the sun, and many may be seen standing in pools or the margins of ponds for refreshment and protection from insects. All animated nature is indulging a languid repose, and the feeble gales hardly shake the leaves of aspen-trees as they pass by them, faint and exhausted with the sultry heats of July.

As June was the month of music and flowers, July is the harvest month of the early fruits; and, though the poet might prefer the former, the present offers the most attractions to the epicure. Strawberries, that gem the meads, and raspberry-bushes that embroider the stone-walls and fences, hang out their ripe, red clusters of berries where the wild-rose and the elder-flower scent the air with their fragrance. The rocks and precipices, so lately crowned with flowers, are festooned with thimbleberries, that spring out in tufts from the mossy crevices half covered with green, umbrageous ferns. There is no spot so barren that it is not covered with something that is beautiful to the sight or grateful to the sense. The little pearly flowers that hung in profusion from the low blueberry-bushes, whose beauty and fragrance we so lately admired, are transformed into azure fruits, that rival the flowers in elegance. Nature would convert us all into epicures by changing into agreeable fruits those beautiful things we contemplated so lately with a tender sentiment allied to that of love. Summer is surely the season of epicurism, as spring is that of the luxury of sentiment. Nature has now bountifully provided for every sense. The trees that afford a pleasant shade are surrounded with an undergrowth of fruitful shrubs, and the winds that fan the brow are laden with odors gathered from beds of roses, azaleas, and honeysuckles. Goldfinches and humming-birds peep down upon us, as they flit among the branches of the trees, and butterflies settle upon the flowers and charm our eyes with their gorgeous colors. In the pastures the red lilies have appeared, and young children who go out into the fields to gather these simple luxuries, after filling their baskets with fruit, crown their arms with bouquets of lilies, laurels, and honeysuckles, rejoicing over their beauty during the happiest, as it is the most simple and natural, period of their lives.

There is not a more agreeable recreation at the present season than a boat-excursion upon a wood-skirted pond, when its alluvial borders are brightly spangled with water-lilies, and the air is full of delicate incense from their sweet-scented flowers. The plover may be seen gliding with nimble feet upon the broad leaves that float on the surface of the waters, so lightly as hardly to impress a dimple on the glossy sheen; and multitudes of fishes are gambolling among their long stems in the clear depths below. Among the fragrant white lilies are interspersed the more curious though less delicate flowers of the yellow lily; and in clusters here and there upon the shore, where the turf is dank and tremulous, the purple sarracenias bow their heads over lands that have never felt the plough. The alders and birches cast a beautiful shade upon the mirrored border of the lake, the birds are singing melodiously among their branches, and clusters of ripe raspberries overhang the banks as we sail along their shelvy sides.

But we listen in vain on our rural excursions for the songs of multitudes of birds that were tuneful a few weeks since. The chattering bobolink, merriest bird of June, has become silent; he will soon doff his black coat and yellow epaulettes, and put on the russet garb of winter. His voice is heard no more in concert with the general anthem of Nature. He has become silent with all his merry kindred, and, instead of the lively notes poured out so merrily for the space of two months, we hear only a plaintive chirping, as the birds wander about the fields in scattered parties, no longer employed in the cares of wedded life. But there are several of our warblers that still remain tuneful. The little wood-sparrow sings more loudly than ever, the vireo and wren still enliven the gardens, and the hermit-thrush daily utters his liquid strains from his deep sylvan retreat upon the wooded hills.

In the place of the birds myriads of chirping insects pour forth during the heat of the day a continual din of merry voices. Day by day are they stringing their harps anew, and leading out a fresh host of musicians, making ready to gladden the autumn with the fulness of their songs. At intervals during the hottest of the weather, we hear the peculiar spinning notes of the harvest-fly, a species of locust, beginning low and with a gradual swell, increasing in loudness for a few seconds, then slowly dying away into silence. To my mind these sounds are vivid remembrancers of the pleasures and languishment of noonday, of cool shades apart from sultry heats, of repose beneath embowering canopies of willows, or grateful repasts of fruits in the summer orchard.

The season of haymaking has arrived, the mowers are busy in their occupation, and the whetting of the scythe blends harmoniously with the sounds of animated nature. The air is filled with the fragrance of new-mown hay, the dying incense-offering of the troops of flowers that perish beneath the fatal scythe. Many are the delightful remembrances connected with haymaking to those who have spent their youth in the country. In moderate summer weather there is no more delightful occupation. Every toil is pleasant that leads us into green fields and fills the mind with the cheerfulness of all living things.

But summer, with all its delightful occasions of joy and rejoicing, is in one respect the most melancholy season of the year. We are now the constant witnesses of some regretful change in the aspect of nature, reminding us of the fate of all things and the transitoriness of existence. Every morning sun looks down upon the graves of whole tribes of flowers that were but yesterday the pride and glory of the fields. Day by day as I pursue my walks, while rejoicing at the discovery of some new and beautiful visitant of the meads, I am suddenly affected with sorrow upon looking around in vain for the little companion of my former excursions, now drooping and faded and breathing its last breath of fragrance into the air.

I am then reminded of early friends who are no longer with the living; who were cut down, one by one, like the flowers, leaving their places to be supplied with new friends, perhaps equally lovely and worthy of our affections, but whose even greater loveliness and worth will never comfort us for the loss of those who have departed. Like flowers, they smiled upon us for a brief season, and, like flowers, they perished after remaining with us but to teach us how to love and how to mourn. The birds likewise sojourn with us only long enough to remind us of the joy of their presence and to afford us an occasion of sorrow when they leave us. We have hardly grown familiar with their songs ere they become silent and prepare for their annual migration. They are like those agreeable companions among our friends who are ever roaming about the world on errands of duty or pleasure, and who only divide with us that pleasant intercourse which they share with other friendly circles in different parts of the earth.

It is now midsummer. Already do we perceive the lengthening of the nights and the shortening of the sun's diurnal orbit. We are reminded by the first observation of this change that summer is rapidly passing away; and we think upon it with a painful sense of the mutability of the seasons. But let us not lament that Nature has ordained these alternations; for though there is no change that does not bring with it some lingering sorrows over the past, yet may it not be that these vicissitudes are the true sources of that happiness which we attribute only to the immediate causes of pleasure? Every month, while it sadly reminds us of the departed joys and beauties of the last, brings with it a recompense in bounties and blessings which the preceding month could not afford. While rejoicing, therefore, amid the voluptuous delights of summer, we will not regret that we cannot live forever among enervating luxuries.

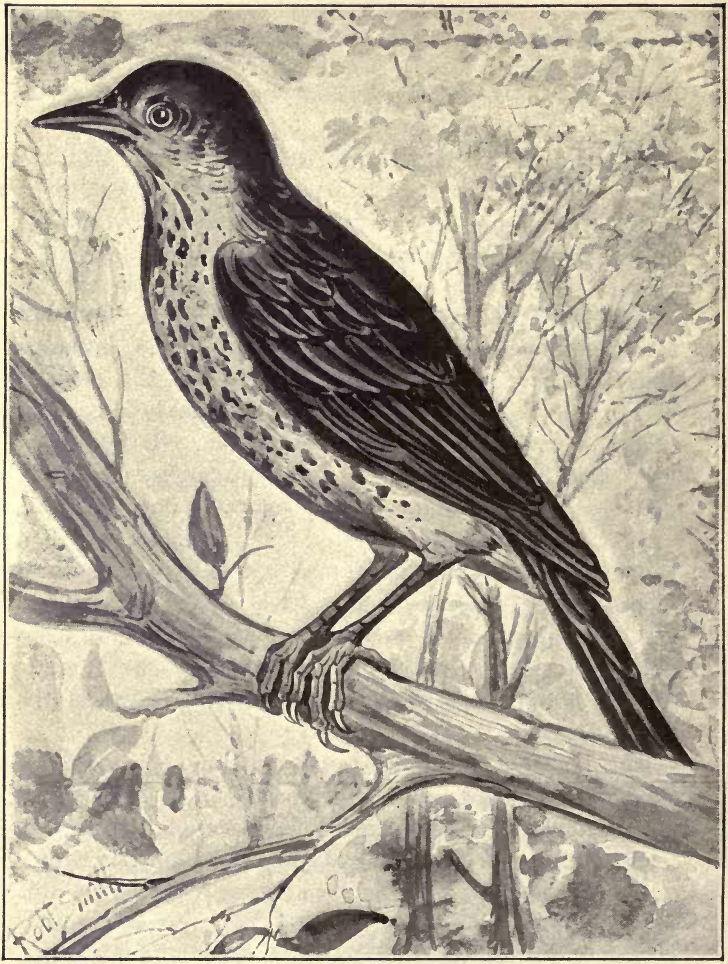
BIRDS OF THE PASTURE AND FOREST.

II.

THE HERMIT-THRUSH.

THE bird whose song I describe in this essay has always seemed to me to be the smallest of the Thrushes. But as I have never killed any bird for the purpose of learning its specific characters, I am liable to be mistaken in many points of identification. It has been my habit from my earliest years, whenever I heard a note that was new and striking, to watch day after day, until I discovered the songster, and, having always had excellent sight, I have never used a telescope. The bird whose notes I describe below, when I have seen it upon a tree or upon the ground, has seemed to conform more nearly to the description given in books of the Hermit-Thrush, both in size and color, than to that given of the Wood-Thrush.

The notes of this bird are not startling or readily distinguished. Some dull ears might not hear them, unless their attention was directed to the sounds. They are loud, liquid, and sonorous, and they fail to attract attention only on account of the long pauses between the different strains. We must link all these strains together to enjoy the full pleasure they are capable of affording, though any single one alone would entitle the bird to considerable reputation as a songster. He also sings as much at broad noonday as at any other time, differing in this respect from the Veery, who prefers the twilight of morn and even. In another important respect he differs



WOOD THRUSH

from the Veery, which is seldom heard except in swamps, while the Hermit almost invariably occupies high and dry woods.

The Hermit-Thrush delights in a shady retreat; he is indeed a true anchorite; he is evidently inspired by solitude, and sings no less in gloomy weather than in sunshine. Yet I think he is no lover of twilight, though pleased with the darkness of shady woods; for at the time when the Veery is most musical, he is generally silent. He is remarkable, also, for prolonging his musical season to near the end of summer. Late in August, when other birds have become silent, he is almost the only songster in the wood.

The song of the Hermit consists of several different strains, or bars, as they would be called in the gamut. I have not determined the exact number, but I am confident there are seven or eight, many of them remarkable for the clearness of their intonations. After each strain he makes a full pause, perhaps not more than three or four seconds, and the listener must be very attentive, or he will lose many of the notes. I think the effect of this sylvan music is somewhat diminished by the pauses or rests. It may be said, however, that during each pause our susceptibility is increased, and we are thus prepared to be more deeply affected by the next notes. Some of these are full and sonorous, like the sound of a fife; others lisping, and somewhat like the chink made by shaking a few thin metallic plates in your hand. This lisping strain always comes regularly in its course. I can imagine that if all these different strains were warbled continuously, they would not be equalled by the song of any bird with which I am acquainted.

Some parts of Nuttall's description of the song of the Hermit, if it be identical with the species called by him the Song-Thrush, are incorrect. It is not true that his different strains or those of the Wood-Thrush "finally blend together in impressive and soothing harmony, becoming more mellow and sweet at every repetition." Any one strain never follows another, without a full pause between them. I think Nuttall has described the song of the Veery, mistaking it for a part of that of the Song-Thrush. One of the enunciations which he attributes to the Song-Thrush is equally remarkable and correct. I allude to "the sound of *ai-ro-ee,* peculiarly liquid, and followed by a trill." The song invariably begins with a clear fife sound, as *too, too, tillere illere,* rising from the first about three musical tones to the second, and making the third and fourth words rather sharp and shrill. We seldom, however, hear more than one low note in a strain, as *too, tillere illere;* afterwards, beginning with the low note *too,* follows the sound of *ai-ro-ee,* like the notes of the common chord. The fourth bar is a lisping strain resembling the sounds made by shaking thin metallic plates in the hand; the fifth, a trilling like the notes of the Veery, — *tillillil, tillillil, tillillil.* There are several other bars consisting of a slight variation of some one of those I have described. I have not been able to determine the order in which the several strains succeed one another. I feel confident, however, that the bird never repeats any one strain, save after two or three others have intervened.

The Wood-Thrush is a larger bird than the Hermit, more common in our woods, having a similar song, containing fewer strains, delivered with less precision and moderation, and with shorter intervals between the high and the low notes. In their general habits the two species differ very slightly.

THE VEERY, OR WILSON'S THRUSH.

The Veery is perceptibly larger than the Hermit, and is marked in a similar manner, save that the back has more of an olive tinge. He arrives early in May, and is first heard to sing during some part of the second week of that month. He is not one of our familiar birds; and unless we live in close proximity to a wood that is haunted by a stream, we seldom hear his voice from our doors and windows. He sings neither in the orchard nor the garden. He shuns the town, and reserves his wild notes for those who live in cottages by the woodside. All who have once become familiar with his song await his arrival with impatience, and take note of his silence in midsummer with regret. Though his song has not the compass and variety of that of the Hermit, it is more continuous and delivered with more fervor. Until this little bird arrives, I feel as an audience do at a concert before the chief singer appears, while the other performers are vainly endeavoring to soothe them by their inferior attempts.

The Veery is more shy than any other important singing-bird except the Hermit. His haunts are solitary woods, usually in the vicinity of a pond or a stream. Here, especially after sunset, he warbles his few brilliant but plaintive strains with a peculiar cadence, and fills the whole forest with music. It seems as if the echoes were delighted with his notes, and took pleasure in passing them round with multiplied reverberations. I am confident that this little warbler refrains from singing when others are vocal, from the pleasure he feels in listening either to his own notes or to the melodious responses which others of his own kindred repeat in different parts of the wood. Hence, he chooses the dusk of evening for his tuneful hour, when the little chirping birds are silent, that their voices may not interrupt his chant.

At this hour, during a period of nine or ten weeks, he charms the evening with his strains, and often prolongs them in still weather until after dusk, and whispers them sweetly into the ear of Night.

His song, though loud for so small a bird, is modulated with such a sweet and flowing cadence that it comes to the ear like a strain from some elfin source. It seems at first to be wanting in variety. I formerly thought so, while at the same time I was puzzled to account for its enchanting effect on the mind of the listener. The same remark may be applied to the human voice. I suppose I am not the only person who can remember certain female voices, which, with limited compass and execution, do, by a peculiar native modulation, combined with great simplicity, affect the listener with emotions such as no *prima donna* could produce. Having never heard the Nightingale, I can draw no comparison between that bird and the Veery. But neither the Mocking-Bird, nor any other bird in our woods, utters a single strain to be compared in sweetness and expression to the five bars of the simple song of the Veery.

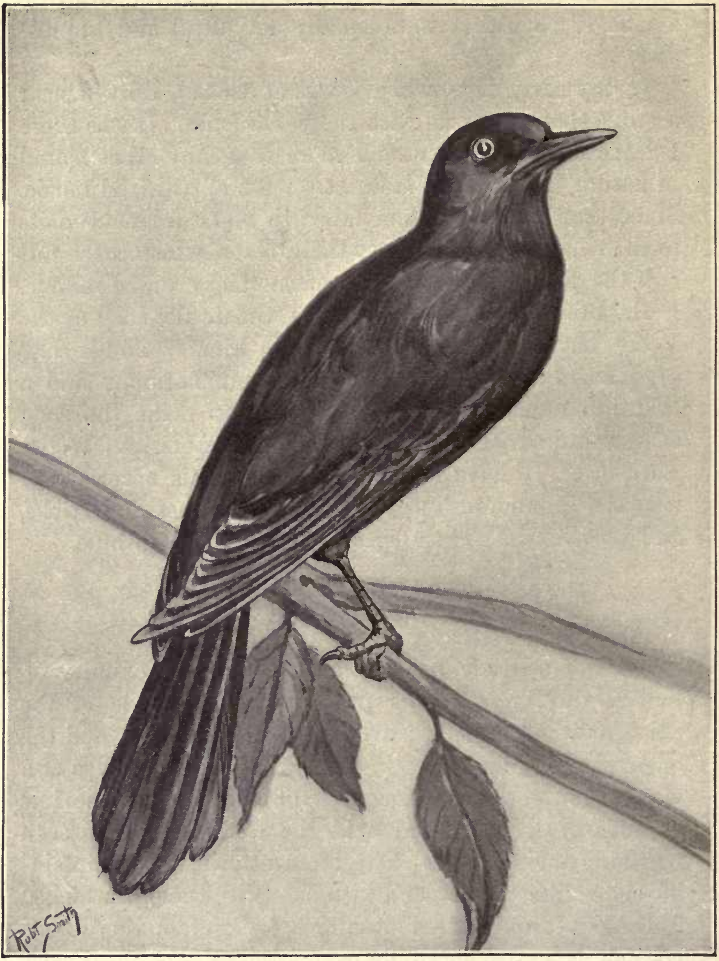
Were we to attempt to perform these notes upon a musical instrument, we should fail from the difficulty of imitating their peculiar trilling and the liquid ventriloquial sounds at the end of each strain. The whole is warbled in such a manner as to produce on the ear the effect of harmony, and to combine in a remarkable degree the two different qualities of brilliancy and plaintiveness. The former effect is produced by the first notes of each strain, which are sudden and on a high key; the second by the graceful chromatic slide to the termination, which is inimitable and exceedingly solemn. I have sometimes imagined that a part of the delightful influence of these notes might be ascribed to the cloistered recesses in which they are delivered. But I have occasionally heard them while the bird was singing from a tree near the heart of a village, when they were equally delightful and impressive.

In my early days, when I was at school, I lived near a grove that was vocal with these Thrushes. It was there I learned to love their song more than any other sound in nature, and above the finest strains of artificial music. Since then I have seldom failed to make frequent visits to their habitats, to listen to their notes, which cause full half the pleasure I derive from a summer evening ramble.

Dr. Brewer does not so highly estimate the song of the Veery, but Mr. Ridgway differs from him. "To his ear," says Dr. Brewer, "there was a solemn harmony and a beautiful expression which combined to make the song of this bird surpass that of all the other American Wood-Thrushes." I have found the nests of this species very near the ground, also upon a mound of grass and sticks, and on a bush. Their eggs are of a greenish-blue.

THE CATBIRD.

Fond of solitude, but not averse to the proximity of human dwellings, if the primitiveness of some of the adjacent wood remains; avoiding the deep forest and the open pastures, and selecting for his habitat the edge of a wooded swamp, or a fragment of forest near the low grounds of a cultivated field, the Catbird may be seen whisking among the thickets, often uttering his complaining mew, like the cry of a kitten. Still, though attached to these wet and retired situations, he is often very familiar, and is not silenced by our presence, like the Veery. His nest of dry sticks is sometimes woven into a currant-bush in a garden that adjoins a swamp, and his quaint notes may be heard, as if totally unmindful of the nearness of his human foe. The Catbird is not an invet-



CATBIRD

erate singer. He seldom makes music his sole employment; though at any hour of the day, from dawn till evening twilight, he may occasionally be heard singing and complaining.

Though I have been all my life familiar with the notes and manners of the Catbird, I have not been able to discover that in his native woods he is a mocker. He seems to me to have a definite song, unlike that of any other songster, except the Red-Thrush. It is not made up from the notes of other birds, but is as unique and original as the song of the Robin or the Linnet. In the song of any bird we may detect occasional strains that resemble those of some other species; but the Catbird gives no more of these imitations than we might reasonably regard as accidental. The truth is, that the Thrushes, though delightful songsters, have inferior powers of execution, and cannot equal the Finches in learning and performing the notes of other birds. Even the Mocking-Bird, compared with many other species, is a very imperfect imitator of any notes which are rapid and difficult of execution. He cannot give the song of the Canary; yet I have heard a caged Bobolink do this to perfection.

The modulation of the Catbird's song is somewhat similar to that of the Red-Thrush, and I have found it sometimes difficult to determine, from the first few notes, whether I was listening to the one or the other; but after a moment I detected one of those quaint utterances that distinguish the notes of the Catbird. I am confident that no man would mistake this song for that of any other species except the Red-Thrush; and in this case his mistake would soon be corrected by longer listening. The Red-Thrush has a louder and fuller intonation, more notes that resemble speech, or that may be likened to it, and some fine guttural tones which the other never utters.

I repeat that I have not any proof, from my own observation, that the Catbird is a mocker. Dr. Brewer says, on the other hand, that it is a very good imitator of simple notes and strains. He has heard it give excellent imitations of the whistling of the Quail, the clucking of a Hen, the notes of the Pewee, and those of the Ground-Robin, repeating them with such exactness as to deceive the birds that were imitated. He has known the Catbird call off a brood of young chickens, to the great annoyance of the old hen.

The Catbird is said to be very amusing when confined in a cage. A former neighbor of mine, who has reared many birds of this species in a cage, informed me that when tamed they sing better than in their native woods. He taught them not only to imitate the notes of other birds, but to sing tunes. This is an important fact; but we must confess that the wild birds and the wild-flowers are more interesting in their native haunts than in aviaries or conservatories. Though I have no sensibility that would prevent my depriving a bird of its freedom by placing it in a comfortable prison, where it would suffer neither in mind nor body, I should not keep one in a cage for my own amusement, caring but little to watch its ways except in a state of freedom.

The mewing note of the Catbird, from which his name was derived, has been the occasion of many misfortunes to his species, causing them to share that contempt which is so generally felt towards the feline race; and that contempt has been followed by persecution. The Catbird has always been proscribed by the New England farmers, who from the first settlement of the country have entertained a prejudice against the most useful of our birds, which are also the most mischievous. Even the Robin has been frequently in danger of proscription. The horticulturists, who seem to consider their cherries and strawberries and favorite insipid pears of more importance than the whole agricultural crop of the States, have made several efforts to obtain an edict of outlawry against him. These repeated onslaughts have induced the friends of the Robin to examine his claims to protection, and the result of their investigations is demonstrative proof that it is one of the most useful birds in existence. The Catbird and all the Thrushes are similar to the Robin in their habits of feeding, but are not sufficiently numerous to equal it in the extent of their services.

THE RED-THRUSH.

After we have grown tired of threading our way through the half-inundated wood-paths in a swamp of red-maple and northern cypress, where there is twilight at broad noonday, and where the only sounds we hear are the occasional sweet notes of the Veery, now and then a few quaint utterances from the Catbird, and the cawing of Crows, high up in the cedars, we emerge into the upland under the bright beams of noonday. The region into which we enter is an open pasture of hill and dale, more than half covered with wild shrubbery, and displaying an occasional clump of trees. There, perched upon the middle branch of some tall tree, the Red-Thrush, the rhapsodist of the woods, may be heard pouring forth his loud and varied song, often continuing it without cessation for half an hour. His notes do not, like those of the Finches and many other birds, have a beginning, a middle, a turn, and a close, as if they were singing the words of a measured hymn. The notes of the Red-Thrush are more like a voluntary for the organ, in which, though there is a frequent repetition of certain strains, the close of the performance comes not after a measured number of notes.

The Red-Thrush has many habits similar to those of the Catbird, but he is not partial to low grounds. He prefers the dry hill and upland, and those places which are half cleared, and seems averse to deep woods. Still, though less of a hermit than the Catbird, he is also less familiar. He dislikes the proximity of dwelling-houses, and courts the solitude of open fields and dry hills distant from the town. This bird probably owes its shyness and timidity to the desperation with which the species have been hunted by men who are unwilling that the birds shall take any pay for the services they perform; and who, to save a dozen cherries from a bird, would sacrifice the tree to mischievous insects. Modern civilized society bears the besom of a devastation greater than the world has yet seen, and when it has completed its work, and destroyed every bird and animal that is capable of doing any service to agriculture, man will perish too, and the whole earth become a combined Sahara and wilderness of Mount Auburns.

The Red-Thrush builds in a low bush, or more frequently upon the ground under a bush. I think he sings at some distance from his nest, selecting for his musical moments the branch of a tree that projects over a rustic roadside. As the roadside supplies a greater abundance of larvæ than the wild pastures, it may be that after having taken his repast, he perches near the place where he obtained it. He is not partial to any certain hour for singing, but is most musical in fine and bright weather. I can always hear him where he dwells in the vocal season, morning, noon, and evening. When employed in song, he makes it his exclusive occupation, and sings, though moderately, with uninterrupted fervor. In this respect he is distinguished above almost all other species. I have observed, however, that if he be disturbed while singing, he immediately becomes silent and may not renew his song under an hour.

The Red-Thrush is considered by many persons the finest songster in the New England forest. Nuttall says "he is inferior only to the Mocking-Bird in musical talent." I doubt his inferiority except as a mocker. He is superior to the Mocking-Bird in variety, and is surpassed by him only in the sweeter intonations of some of his notes. But no person grows tired of listening to the Red-Thrush, who constantly varies his notes, while the Mocking-Bird tires us with his repetitions, which are often continued to a ludicrous extreme. Perhaps I might give the palm to the Mocking-Bird, were it not for his detestable habit of imitation. But when this habit is considered, I do, without hesitation, place the Red-Thrush above him as a songster, and above every other bird with whose notes I am acquainted. If I were listening to a melodramatic performance, in which all were perfect singers and actors, I should prefer the *prima donna* to the clown, even if the clown occasionally gave a good imitation of her voice.

When we are in a thoughtful mood, the song of the Veery surpasses all others in tranquillizing the mind and yielding something like enchantment to our thoughts. At other times, when strolling in a whortleberry pasture, it seems to me that nothing can exceed the simple melody of the Wood-Sparrow. But without claiming for the Red-Thrush, in any remarkable degree, the plaintiveness that distinguishes these pensive warblers, his song in the open field has a charm for all ears, and can be appreciated by the dullest of minds. Without singing badly he pleases the millions. He is vocal at all hours of the day, and when thus employed, devotes himself entirely to song with evident enthusiasm.

It would be difficult, either by word or by musical notation, to give to one who has not heard the song of the Red-Thrush a correct idea of it. This bird is not a rapid singer. His performance is a sort of *recitative,* often resembling spoken words rather than musical notes, many of which are short and guttural. He seldom whistles clearly, like the Robin, but he produces a charming variety of tone and modulation. Some of his notes are delivered rapidly, but every strain is followed by a momentary pause, resembling the discourse of a man who speaks fast, but hesitates after every few words. He is rapid, but not voluble.

An ingenious shoemaker, named Wallace, whom I knew in my early days, and who, like many others of his craft when they worked alone or in small companies in their own shops, and not by platoons as in a steam factory, was a close observer of nature and mankind, gave me the following words as those repeated by the Red-Thrush: "Look up, look up, — Glory to God, glory to God, — Hallelujah, Amen, Videlicet."

Thoreau, in one of his quaint descriptions, gives an offhand sketch of the bird, which I will quote: "Near at hand, upon the topmost spray of a birch, sings the Brown-Thrasher, or Red Mavis, as some love to call him, — all the morning glad of your society (or rather I should say of your lands), that would find out another farmer's field if yours were not here. While you are planting the seed, he cries, 'Drop it, drop it, — cover it up, cover it up, — pull it up, pull it up, pull it up.'"

The Red-Thrush is most musical in the early part of the season, or in the month succeeding his arrival about the middle of May; the Veery is most vocal in June, and the Song-Thrush in July. The Catbird begins early and sings late, and fills out with his quaint notes the remainder of the singing season, after the others, save the Song-Thrush, have become silent.

PROTECTION OF BIRDS.

THE presence of birds as companions of a home in the country is desirable to all, next to woods, flowers, green fields, and pleasant prospects. Without birds, the landscape, if not wanting in beauty, would lack something which is necessary to the happiness of all men who are above a savage or a boor. Indeed, it is highly probable that Nature owes more to the lively motions, songs, and chattering of the feathered race for the benign effects of her charms, than to any other single accompaniment of natural scenery. They are so intimately associated with all that is delightful in field and forest, with our early walks in the morning, our rest at noonday, and our meditations at sunset; with the trees that spread their branches over our heads, and the lively verdure at our feet, that it is difficult to think of one apart from the others. Through the voices of birds Nature may be said to speak to us, and without them she would be a dumb companion whose beauty would hardly be felt.

Both from our regard for their utility to agriculture and for their pleasant companionship with man, we have thousands of motives for protecting the birds. Very little attention has been paid to this subject. A few laws have been made for their preservation; but they have seldom been enforced. I believe the farmer would promote his own thrift by extending a watchful care over all families of birds, but the smaller species are the most useful and delightful. It seems as if Nature had given them beauty of plumage and endowed them with song, that man by their attractions might be induced to preserve a race of creatures so valuable to his interest.

There are two ways of preserving the birds: we may avoid destroying them, and we may promote the growth of certain trees, shrubs, and plants that afford them shelter and subsistence. The familiar birds that live in our gardens and orchards will multiply in proportion as the forests are cleared and the land devoted to tillage, if the clearing does not amount to baldness. To this class belong many of our sparrows, the robin, the bobolink, — indeed, all our familiar species. The solitary birds that inhabit the pasture and forest would probably be exterminated by the same operations that would increase the number of robins and sparrows. It is no less necessary to keep the birds for the preservation of the forests than to keep the forests for the preservation of the birds.

To insure the protection of all species, there must be a certain proportion of thicket and wildwood. The little wood-sparrow seldom frequents our villages, unless they are closely surrounded by woods. Yet this bird lives and breeds in the open field. He frequents the pastures which are overgrown with wild shrubbery and its accompaniment of vines, mosses, and ferns. He is always found in the whortleberry field, and probably makes an occasional repast on its fruits in their season. He builds his nest on the ground or on a mossy knoll protected by a thicket. All birds are attached to grounds which are covered with particular kinds of plants and shrubbery that sustain their favorite insect food. If we destroy this kind of vegetation, we drive away the species that are chiefly attached to it from our vicinity, to seek their natural habitats. We may thus account for the silence that pervades the locality of many admired country-seats; for with regard to the wants of our familiar birds it is often that trimming and cultivation are carried to a pernicious extreme.

There will be no danger for many years to come that our lands will be so thoroughly stripped of their native growth of herbs, trees, and shrubs as to leave the birds without their natural shelter in some places. The danger that awaits them is that they may be driven out of particular localities, and the inhabitants thereby deprived of the presence of many interesting songsters. Wherever the native species are abundant, we find a considerable proportion of cultivated land, numerous orchards, extensive fields of grass and grain, interspersed with fragments of forest or wildwood, well provided with watercourses. Where these conditions are present, the familiar birds will be numerous if they are not destroyed. If these cultivated lands lie in the vicinity of pastures abounding in thickets and wild shrubbery, fragments of wood and their indigenous undergrowth, we may then hear occasionally the notes of the solitary birds, many of which are superior in song. Wild shrubbery and its carpet of vines and mosses form the conditions that are necessary for the preservation of these less familiar species.

The shrubs that bear fruit are the most useful to the birds, especially as they are infested by more insects than other kinds. The vaccinium, the viburnum, the cornel, the elder, the celastrus, and the small cherries are abundant where there is a goodly number of the less familiar birds. If we clear our woods of their undergrowth and convert them into parks, we do in the same proportion diminish the numbers of many species. No such clearing as this is favorable to any of the feathered race. But the clearing and cultivation of the land outside of the woods, if it be done rudely, leaving bushes on all barren knolls and elevations, is beneficial to all kinds of birds by increasing the quantity of insect food in the soil. A nice man at the head of a farm would do more to prevent the multiplication of birds, than a dozen striplings with their guns. The removal of this miscellaneous undergrowth and border shrubbery would as effectually banish the red-thrush, the catbird, and the smaller thrushes, as we should extirpate the squirrels by destroying all the nut-bearing trees and shrubs.

A smooth-shaven green is delightful to the eye at all times; but lawn is a luxury that is obtained at the expense of the familiar birds that nestle upon the ground. The song-sparrows build their nests in the most frequented places, if they are not liable to be disturbed. Not a rod from our dwelling-house these little birds may have their nests, if the right conditions are there. They are often built on the side of a mound overrun by blackberry-vines and wild rose-bushes. He who would entice them to breed in his enclosures must not, for the preservation of a foolish kind of neatness, eradicate the native shrubs and vines as useless weeds.

Clipped hedge-rows, which have been recommended as nurseries of birds, are checks to their multiplication. A hedge-row cannot be "properly" maintained without keeping the soil about its roots clear of grass and wild herbage, which are needful to the birds. It is only a neglected hedge-row that is useful to them, or a spontaneous growth of bushes and briers, such as constitutes one of the picturesque attractions of a New England stone-wall. We seldom see one that is not covered on each side with roses, brambles, spirea, viburnum, and other native vines and shrubs, so that in some of our open fields the stone-walls, with their accompaniments, are the most attractive objects in the landscape. Along their borders Nature calls out, in their season, the anemone, the violet, the cranesbill, the bellwort, the convolvulus, and many other flowers of exceeding beauty, while the rest of the field is devoted to tillage.

The "nice man" who undertakes farming will grudge

Nature this narrow strip on each side of his fences, though she never fails to cover it with beauty. He considers it an offence against neatness and order to allow Nature these simple privileges, and employs his hired men to keep down every plant that dares to peep out from the fence-border without a license from the owner. Such a miscellaneous hedge-row would constitute a perfect aviary of singing-birds, and the benefits they would confer upon the farmer by ridding his lands of noxious insects would amply compensate him for the space left unimproved. Then might we hear the notes of the wood-thrush and the red-mavis in the very centre of our villages, and hundreds of small birds of different species would cheer us by their songs where at present only a solitary individual is to be heard.

From the earliest times it has been customary to encourage the multiplication of swallows by the erection of bird-houses in gardens and enclosures. Even the Indians furnished a hospitable retreat for the purple martin by fixing hollow gourds and calabashes upon the branches of trees near their cabins. It is generally believed that this active little bird is capable of driving away hawks and crows from its vicinity by repeated annoyances. The custom of supplying martins with a shelter has of late grown into disuse. The wren and the bluebird may be encouraged by similar accommodations. But as these two species are not social in their habits of building, like the martin, a separate box must be supplied for each pair of birds. The wren is an indefatigable destroyer of insects and one of the most interesting of our familiar songsters. The bluebird, which is not less familiar, is delighted with the hollow branch of an old tree in an orchard, but is equally well satisfied with a box.

AUGUST.

THE plains and uplands are green with a second growth of vegetation, and nature is rapidly repairing the devastation committed by the scythe of the mower. But the work of the haymaker is not completed. He is still swinging his scythe among the tall sedge-grasses in the lowlands; and the ill-fated flowers of August may be seen lying upon the greensward among the prostrate herbage. The work of the reapers is also begun, and the sheaves of wheat and rye display their wavy rows to gladden and bless the husbandman. Flocks of quails, reared since the opening of the spring flowers, are diligent among the fields, after the reapers have left their tasks. They may be seen slyly and silently creeping along the ground, and now and then lifting their timid heads as if jealous of our approach. The loud whistling of the guardian of the flock, perched at a short distance upon a wall, may also be heard, and as we saunter carelessly along the field-path, a brood of partridges, rising suddenly almost from under our feet, will often astound our ears with their loud whirring flight.

Since the fading of the roses, the birds have generally become silent, as if the presence of these flowers were necessary to inspire them with song. They have grown timid and have forsaken their usual habits, no longer warbling at the season's feast or rejoicing in the heyday of love. They fly no longer in pairs, but assemble in flocks, which may be seen rising and settling over different parts of the landscape. Some species are irregularly scattered, while others gather into multitudinous flocks, and seem to be enjoying a long holiday of festivities, while preparing to leave their native fields. Their songs, lasting only during the period of love, are discontinued since it is past, and their young are no longer awaiting their care. On every new excursion into the fields I perceive the sudden absence of some important woodland melodist. During the interval between midsummer and early autumn one voice after another drops away, until the little song-sparrow is left again to warble alone in the fields and gardens, where he sang the earliest hymn of rejoicing over the departure of winter.

Since the birds have become silent, they have lost their pleasant familiarity with man, and have acquired an unwonted shyness. The warblers that were wont to sing on the boughs just over our heads, or at a short distance from our path, now keep at a timid distance, chirping with a complaining voice, and flee at our approach, before we are near enough to observe their altered plumage. The plovers have come forth from the places where they reared their young and congregate in large flocks upon the marshes; and as we stroll along the sea-shore, we are often agreeably startled by the sudden twittering flight of these graceful birds, aroused from their haunts by our unexpected intrusion.

It is now almost impossible for the rambler to penetrate some of his old accustomed paths in the lowlands, so thickly are they interwoven with vines and trailing herbs. Several species of cleavers with their slender prickly branches form a close network among the ferns and rushes; and the smilax and blackberry vines weave an almost impenetrable thicket in our ancient pathway. The fences are festooned with the blue flowers of the woody nightshade and the more graceful plants of the glycine are twining among the faded flowers of the elder and viburnum. The lowlands were never more delightful than at the present time, affording many a pleasant arbor beneath the shrubbery, where the waters have dried away and left the greensward as sweetly scented as a bower of honeysuckles. In these places are we tempted to linger for refreshment on summer noondays, — bowers where it is delightful to repose beneath the shade of slender birches whose tremulous foliage seems to whisper to us some pleasant messages of peace. All around us the convolvulus has trailed its delicate vines, and hung out its pink and striped bell-flowers; and the clematis has formed an umbrageous trellis-work over the tops of the trees. Its white clustering blossoms spread themselves out in triumph above the clambering grape-vines, forming deep shades which the sun cannot penetrate, overhanging and overarching the green paths that lead through the lowland thickets.

When the pale orchis of the meads is dead, and the red lily stands divested of its crown; when the arethusa no longer bends its head over the stream, and the later violets are weeping incense over the faded remnants of their lovely tribe, then I know that the glory of summer has departed, and I look not until the coming of the asters and the goldenrods to see the fields again robed in beauty. The meeker flowers have perished since the singing-birds have discontinued their songs, and the last rose of summer may be seen in solitary and melancholy beauty, — the lively emblem of the sure decline of all the beautiful objects of this life, the lovely symbol of beauty's frailty and its transientness. When the last rose is gone, I look around with sadness upon its late familiar haunts; I feel that summer's beauty now is past, and sad mementos rise where'er I tread.

It is my delight to seek these last-born of the roses, and to my sight they are more beautiful than any that preceded them, as if Nature, like a partial mother, had lavished her best gifts upon these her youngest children. The bushes that support them are overtopped by other plants, that seem to feel an envious delight in concealing them from observation, but they cannot blot them from our memory, nor be admired as we admire them. The clethra with its white odoriferous flowers, and the button-bush with its elegant globular heads, strive vainly to equal them in fragrance or beauty. The proud and scornful thistle rears its head close by their side, and seems to mock at the fragility of these lovely flowers; but the wild briar, though its roses have faded, still gives out its undying perfume, as if the essence of the withered flowers lingered about their former leafy habitation, like spirits about the places they loved in their lifetime.

In the latter part of the month we begin to mark the approaching footsteps of autumn. Twilight is chill, and we perceive the greater length of the nights and evening's earlier dew. The morning sun is later in the heavens, and sooner tints the fleecy clouds of evening. The bright verdure of the trees has faded to a more dusky green; and here and there in different parts of the woods may be found a sere and yellow leaf, like the white hairs that are interspersed among the dark-brown tresses of manhood, that indicate the sure advance of hoary years. The fields of ripe and yellow grain gleam through the open places in the woods, making a pleasant contrast with their greenness, displaying in the same instant the signs of a cheerful harvest and the melancholy decay of vegetation. The swallows assemble their little hosts upon the roofs and fences, preparing for their annual migration, and all things announce the speedy decline of summer.

BIRDS OF THE PASTURE AND FOREST.

III.

THE CUCKOO.

Our native Cuckoos have not the free-love instinct of the European Cuckoo; and Daines Barrington would have been delighted to quote their good parental habits as an argument in his special plea for the European bird, whom he considered the victim of slander. The Cowbird is our Cuckoo in the moral acceptation of the term. The American Cuckoo is attached to its offspring in a remarkable degree, and rears them with all the fidelity of the most devoted parents. In my boyhood, the two severest fights I had with birds on approaching their nests were once when I examined the nest of a Bluejay, and again when I examined one belonging to a Cuckoo. The young Cuckoos were equally savage when I attempted to handle them. Yet this bird bears the reputation of cowardice.

It is remarkable that the American Cuckoo, though a faithful and devoted parent, should have certain peculiar habits connected with laying and hatching, that bear some evidence that the European and American species have a common derivation. The habit of the European bird of dropping its eggs into other birds' nests is probably connected with continued laying, extended to a greater length of time than with other birds. The same fertility has been observed in the American Cuckoos. Mr. Audubon mentions the peculiar habit of these birds of laying fresh eggs and hatching them successively. Thus it would seem that the last-laid eggs were hatched by the involuntary brooding of the young which had not left the nest. Dr. Brewer has "repeatedly found in a nest three young and two eggs, one of the latter nearly fresh, one with the embryo half developed, while of the young birds, one would be just out of the shell, one half fledged, and one just ready to fly. Subsequent observations in successive seasons led to the conviction that both the Yellow-billed and the Black-billed Cuckoo share in these peculiarities, and that it is a general but not universal practice."

Dr. Brewer mentions an interesting fact that evinces the strong attachment of the Cuckoo to its offspring. Speaking of the Black-billed Cuckoo, he says: "Both parents are assiduous in the duties of incubation and in supplying food to each other and their offspring. In one instance where the female had been shot by a thoughtless boy, as she flew from the nest, the male bird successfully devoted himself to the solitary duty of rearing the brood of five. At the time of the death of the female, the nest contained two eggs and three young birds. The writer was present when the bird was shot, and was unable to interfere in season to prevent it. Returning to the spot not long afterwards, he found the widowed male sitting upon the nest, and so unwilling to leave it as almost to permit himself to be captured by the hand. His fidelity and his entreaties were not disregarded. This nest, eggs, and young were left undisturbed; and as they were visited from time to time, the young nestlings were found to thrive under his vigilant care. The eggs were hatched out, and in time the whole five were reared in safety."

The Cuckoo is an early visitor. His voice is often heard before the first of May, proclaiming that "the spring is coming in," like his congener in England, who has always been regarded as the harbinger of that season.

His note is not strictly musical, yet we all listen to the first sound of his voice with as much pleasure as to that of the Bluebird or Song-Sparrow. I have not met a person who was not delighted to hear it. It may be called, figuratively, one of the picturesque sounds in Nature, reminding us of the resurrection of the long-hidden charms of the season. The Cuckoo is swift in his flight, which resembles that of a Dove so much that I have often mistaken them. In plumage and general shape this bird is like the Red-Thrush, with some mixture of olive.

THE COWBIRD.

Young nest-hunters, who are persistent in their enterprises, and who pursue their occupation partly from rational curiosity and not from mere wantonness, are often surprised on finding in the nest of some small bird a single egg larger than others in the same nest. In my own days of academic truancy, I found this superfluous egg most frequently in Sparrows' nests. It was not until I had made a large collection of eggs that I discovered the parentage of the odd ones. These eggs were generally speckled; but I occasionally found a large bluish egg among others of the same color, and supposed they must contain two yolks, save that birds in a wild state seldom produce such monstrosities. Can it be that the American Cuckoo occasionally follows the instincts of his European congener? In each case I considered the spurious eggs as lawful plunder, since they were an imposition practised upon the owner of the nest either by some unknown bird or by the Cowbird, a member of a family which are too aristocratic to rear their own offspring. But as a politician of the speculative class I feel a peculiar interest in the Cowbird, as affording me an opportunity of understanding the system of free love, as exemplified in the habits of this species.

The Cowbird has no song. Nature seldom furnishes any creature with an instinct which would be of no service to the species. What occasion has the Cowbird for a song, — a bird that neither wooes nor marries, — a bird that would not sing lullabies to its own young; that cares no more for one female than for another, and whose indifference is perfectly reciprocated? As well might a poet write Petrarchian sonnets who was never in love; or a practical plodder write amatory songs, who asks the members of a church whom he shall marry. There is nothing romantic in this bird's character. His love is a mere gravitation. Nature, despising his habits, has not even arrayed him in attractive plumage; for why should he have beauty when his whole species are without the sentiment that could appreciate it? The Cowbirds are the free-love party among the feathered tribes, — the party also of communism, who would leave their offspring in others' hands, that they may have leisure for æsthetic culture.

"This species," says Dr. Brewer, "is at all times gregarious and polygamous, never mating and never exhibiting any signs of either conjugal or parental affection. Like the Cuckoos of Europe, our Cow-Blackbird never constructs a nest of her own, and never hatches out or attempts to rear her own offspring, but imposes her eggs upon other birds; and most of them, either unconscious of the imposition or unable to rid themselves of the alien, sit upon and hatch the stranger, and in so doing virtually destroy their own offspring; for the eggs of the Cowbird are the first hatched, usually two days before the others. The nursling is much larger in size, filling up a large portion of the nest, and is insatiable in appetite, always clamoring to be fed, and receiving by far the larger share of the food brought to her nest; its foster companions, either starved or stifled, soon die, and their dead bodies are removed, it is supposed, by the parents. They are never found near the nest, as they would be if the young Cow-Blackbird expelled them as does the Cuckoo; indeed, Mr. Nuttall has seen parent birds removing the dead young to a distance from the nest and there dropping them."

THE REDWING-BLACKBIRD.

In early spring no sounds attract so much attention as the unmusical notes of the Redwing-Blackbird coming to our ears from every wooded meadow. A sort of *chip-chip churee,* mixed with many other confused and some guttural sounds, forms this remarkable chorus, which seems to be a universal chattering, hardly to be considered a song. Most of the notes are sharp, and in none could I ever detect anything like musical intonation. Sometimes they seem to chant in concert with the little piping frogs, though the sounds made by the latter are by far the most musical. Indeed, the Redwing-Blackbird never sings, though we frequently hear from a solitary individual the sound of *chip-churee.*

This bird, as well as the Cowbird, is a free-lover, though the females have not yet declared their rights, and their communistic prejudices are not sufficient to cause them to refuse to rear and educate their offspring. In early April assemblages of Redwings, perched upon trees standing in wet grounds, constantly chatter in merry riot, while the bright scarlet epauletted males strive to recommend themselves by music, like some awkward youth who serenades his mistress with a jewsharp. These notes seem to spring from a fulness of joy upon returning to their native swamps. The Redwings undoubtedly mate, though there is plainly no jealousy among them. Like the Otaheitans, a flock of birds has a flock of wives, the true wife being recognized above the others only while rearing their young. In this respect they differ from the gallinaceous birds, who resolutely demand exclusive possession of all the females and establish their right by might. They fight until the conqueror is left to be the sultan of the flock.

The nests of the Redwing are always suspended upon a bush or a tuft of reeds in a half-inundated meadow. I have frequently found them in a button-bush, surrounded by water ; but they are also suspended from the perpendicular stalks of cat-tails, which encircle the nests, bound to them by the leaves of the same plant or any other fibrous material which is near at hand. The Redwing displays almost as much dexterity as the Baltimore Oriole in the construction of its nest, which is always firmly woven so that it is not easily detached from its position. It rears but one brood in a season. The eggs have a whitish ground tinged slightly with blue, and mottled with dark purple blotches irregularly distributed. The Redwings are resolute defenders of their nest and young, both parents manifesting equal anxiety and courage.

Like all our most useful birds, the Redwings are very mischievous, consuming Indian corn while it is in the milk, and thus doing an incalculable amount of damage, especially at the South, where the species assemble in countless flocks. Alexander Wilson has seen them so numerous in Virginia during the month of January, as to resemble an immense black cloud. When they settled upon a meadow their united voices made a sound which, heard at a distance, was sublime ; and when they all rose together upon the wing, the noise was like distant thunder. He took particular notice of the glitter of their epaulets, flashing from thousands of wings from this vast assemblage. At the North they are seldom numerous enough to do any extensive damage, and they are such indefatigable hunters of all those grubs that are concealed beneath the surface of the ground, that they probably compensate in this way for all the mischief they perform.

THE PURPLE GRACKLE.

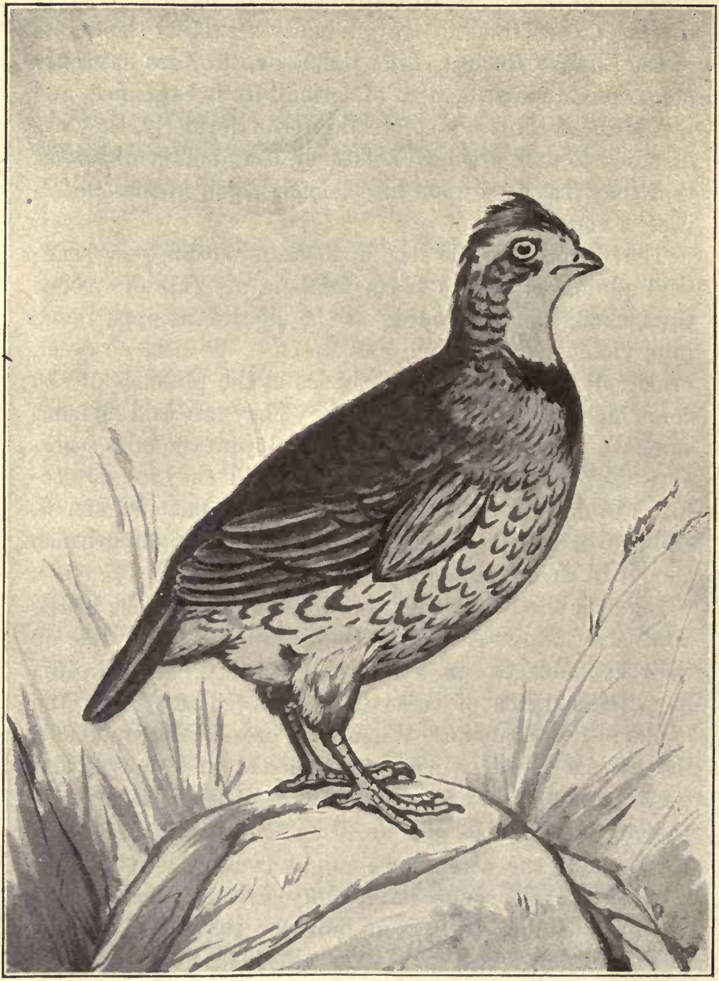
High up in the pines or firs that constitute a grove outside of any of our villages, in the latter part of April, small flocks of Purple Grackles may be seen gathered together like Rooks, and making the whole neighborhood resound with their garrulity. They are not very shy birds, seeming hardly conscious of the enmity with which they are regarded by the villagers near whose habitations they congregate. They become every year more numerous and familiar, their numbers increasing with the extension of the area of tillage. In no way is the truth of the Malthusian theory more clearly proved or more plainly illustrated than in the habits of certain species of birds. They will increase in spite of our persistent efforts to exterminate them, unless we cut down our woods and thickets to deprive them of a shelter and a home. A single model farmer or landscape-gardener may do more in the way of their extermination, by keeping his grounds nice, and clear of undergrowth, than twenty mischievous boys with guns or a dozen avaricious farmers with their nets. Birds that, like the Robin and the Grackle, consume all sorts of insects they can find upon the ground, will increase with their supply of insect food. If we wish to stop their multiplication, we must bury every fertilizer six feet deep.

The Grackles are intelligent birds, and, though apparently not very shy, they are wise enough to build their nests in the tops of tall trees which are difficult of access, choosing an evergreen for this purpose, that they may be more safely concealed. These birds have been known to build sometimes in the hollows of trees; likewise inside of the spire of a church and in martin-houses. Indeed, Mr. S. P. Fowler thinks that as human population increases, the Grackles are gradually assuming the habits of the English Rooks. Like the Rook, they are naturally gregarious, and as the area of agriculture is expanded, and woods afford birds less protection than formerly, they are disposed to seek artificial shelter in the vicinity of towns, that they may feed upon insect food, which in these localities is very abundant.

The Purple Grackle has, upon examination, very beautiful plumage; for its black feathers are full of various tints, changeable, according as the light falls upon them, into violet, purple, blue, and green. We see, however, nearly all the same varying shades in the plumage of the common Cock, when it is black. They are said to consume so much corn as to seriously injure the crop wherever they exist in large numbers. Still they are so useful as to deserve not only protection, but encouragement, and groves in which they can nestle without disturbance should be saved for them.

Like the Redwing, they assemble in large flocks in the Southern States. According to Wilson, the magnitude of their assemblages can hardly be described. In Virginia he witnessed one of these myriad flocks settled on the banks of the Roanoke. When they arose at his approach, the noise of their wings was like distant thunder, and they completely hid from sight the fields over which they passed by the blackness of their multitudinous flocks. He thought the assemblage might contain hundreds of thousands. The depredations of such immense flocks upon the Indian-corn crop must be incalculable, since they are known to attack it in all stages of its growth, beginning as soon as it is planted.

In New England they remain only during the breeding-season, when it is a well-established fact that their whole



QUAIL

diet consists of worms and insects. Good observers who have watched them here testify to the truth of this assertion. They do, in fact, consume but little corn or grain at any season, save when they cannot find a sufficient supply of insect food. When associated in such vast flocks as described by Wilson, they are necessarily granivorous.

THE QUAIL.

I have not yet seen any good reason for denying that the Quail is a Quail; nor can I understand why, in the new classifications of birds, the marks that formerly characterized species are now used to characterize genera. Let us pursue the same philosophical rule to its final results, and we shall arrive at the discovery that the different varieties of the common fowl constitute so many genera, and that the black and the white and the Seebright Bantams, for example, are species of the genus *Galliparvus*. But the Quail, whether it be itself or another bird, is now a rare inhabitant of New England. Thousands of its species were destroyed by the deep snows of the winter of 1856–57, and again by the cold winter of 1867–68. Indeed, every winter destroys great numbers of them. And as the Quail does not migrate, and never wanders any great distance from its birthplace, I cannot understand why its species could ever have been numerous so far north as the New England States, unless the vast numbers rendered it impossible for any accident of Nature to destroy so many that there should not be multitudes left. But since the white man came, the gun, the snare, and the winters united have nearly extirpated the whole race.

For many years past I have seldom heard the musical voice of the Quail. Seldom is the haymaker in these days reminded of the approach of showers by his proclamation of "More wet" from some adjoining fence. Not that the few that remain are no longer prophets, but they have become timid from the persecutions they have suffered, and have ceased to prophesy in the vicinity of the farm. Neither does the Quail any longer make known his presence to his mate by saying in musical tones, "Here 's Bob White." He knows too well that this would lead to his discovery and death. Man, too short-sighted to understand his own selfish advantage in protecting the bird, and too avaricious to let pass the opportunity of buying a feast with a few cheap charges of powder and shot, will give him no peace.

A female Quail, leading her little brood under the shelter of pines to escape the notice of those who have intruded into her presence, is one of the most interesting sights in animated nature. The rapidity with which the young make their escape to some hiding-place in the grass or among the bushes, and the anxiety displayed by the mother, cannot fail to awaken our sympathy. If we sit still in ambush and watch for them, the mother, no longer aware of our presence, gives her cheerful call-note, when they all suddenly reappear and follow her, as chickens follow the hen. Their timidity and their expertness in wending their way through the thicket and then out on the open land, and their nimble motions as they forage in the pasture for grubs and insects, are an ample reward to any sympathetic observer for long and patient watching.

The destruction of this useful and interesting species by our winter snows is a public calamity; and nothing, it seems to me, can mitigate the evil save the building of artificial shelters, strewing around them some sort of grain to prevent their wandering far away from them. Our farmers have not sufficiently considered the advantages they might derive from this semi-domestication of the Quail and some other species that winter with us. Even if this protection were offered them only that their surplus might be used to grace our tables, it would be found a profitable enterprise.

THE RUFFED GROUSE.

In May, if we were to wander into an extensive wood which is not a swamp, at a sufficient distance from any village tavern, we should probably hear the drumming of the Partridge. This peculiar sound is heard early in the morning and late in the evening, becoming more frequent and persistent as the breeding-season advances. It is made by the male, and is unlike any other sound I ever heard. I cannot compare it to the rumbling of distant thunder, as some do, because the sounds of thunder are irregular, while the strokes of the Partridge's wings are perfectly timed, and increase in rapidity as they decrease in loudness, until they die away in a faint, fluttering vibration.

I think those observers are mistaken who believe this drumming to be made by striking or flapping his wings against his sides or against the log where he is standing. Samuels says: "The bird resorts to a fallen trunk of a tree or log, and while strutting like a male Turkey, beats his wings against his sides and the log with considerable force. It commences very slowly, and after a few strokes gradually increases in velocity, and terminates with a rolling beat very similar to the roll of a drum." Dr. Brewer describes the sound as produced in the same manner, and this seems to be the universal opinion. On the contrary, the bird produces this sound by striking the shoulders of his wings together over his back, as the common Cock frequently does before he crows, and as the male Pigeon does when after dalliance with his mate he flies out exultingly a short distance from his perch. It is very difficult to obtain sight of the bird while he is drumming, and then we cannot venture near enough to see his motions very distinctly. But whenever I have gained sight of one in the act of drumming, he seemed to me to elevate his wings and strike them together over his back, increasing the rapidity of these strokes, until the last was nothing more than the sound produced upon the air by the rapid vibration of the feathers of his wings and tail. A similar vibrating sound is made by the Turkey with his tail-feathers when strutting about the yard among the females.

It seems very improbable that the Grouse has sufficient power to make so much sound by flapping the concave surface of his wings against his downy sides. Birds cannot move their wings with so much force in this direction as in the opposite one; and so long as some uncertainty exists about it, it is the wisest course to reason from analogy, and to conclude that the Partridge makes this sound as similar ones are made by certain domestic birds. Many of our farmers believe that this bird stands on a log and makes the drumming sound by striking the shoulders of his wings against the log. Some think the log must therefore be hollow. But instances are well known where a bird has selected a rock for his drumming-place, when the same sound is produced.

As the flapping of the wings of the common Cock previous to crowing is a mode of expressing defiance, the same may be said of the drumming of the Partridge, who before and after his drumming struts about in the most amusing way, placing himself in many graceful attitudes. All these actions are a part of the ceremony of courtship. They always, therefore, excite the jealousy of other males, who, if sufficiently bold, will immediately attack the drummer. The conqueror draws in his train the greater part of the females, and becomes their favorite.

FORAGING HABITS OF BIRDS.

The different habits of foraging that distinguish the several tribes and species of birds deserve attention as indicating a similar difference in the character of their aliment. Birds, for example, that take their food chiefly from the surface of the ground forage in a different manner from others that collect it from under the surface. Swallows catch all their food while on the wing, and give proof by this habit that they take only winged insects; but their manners differ essentially from those of the fly-catchers, that do not take their prey on the wing, but seize it as it passes by their perch. Robins and blackbirds gather their fare entirely from the ground, but their ways while seeking it differ exceedingly. Their respective habits of foraging are adapted to the successful pursuit of the worms and insects that constitute their principal diet. Though both species are consumers of all kinds of insects, they have their preferences, which are the chief objects of their pursuit. It is necessary to study their different habits of foraging to understand the principle which I have endeavored to inculcate, *that each species performs certain services in the economy of nature, which cannot be so well accomplished by any other species;* and that it is necessary for this end to preserve all in such proportions as would spontaneously exist if the whole feathered race were unmolested and left to their own natural chances of living and multiplying.

The sylvians are the most interesting of foragers among the smaller birds, and are remarkable for their diligence in hunting their prey. They have a peculiar way of examining the foliage and blossoms rather than the surface of the branches, and their motions are very conspicuous upon the outer parts of the trees near the extremity of the spray. The golden robin hunts his prey like the sylvians, though he is not one of them, and his motions are more rapid and energetic than theirs.

The wren, the creeper, and the chickadee seek their food while creeping round the branches, and take less of it from the foliage than the sylvians or the flycatchers. They seldom pause in their circuitous course, proceeding usually from the junctions of the branches to their extremities, hopping from spray to spray, and then passing to another tree. The sylvians appear to examine the leaves and blossoms, while the creepers and tomtits examine the bark of the tree. Hence the former do not prolong their stay with us after the fall of the leaf, while the other species are seen after the trees are entirely denuded. We may infer, therefore, that the sylvians feed chiefly upon beetles and other winged insects that devour the leaves of trees, while the creepers and tomtits take more insects in embryo, which during autumn and winter are half concealed in the bark of trees.

The habits of the flycatchers differ from those of any of the species above named. Let us take the pewee as an example. He sits on a twig almost without motion, but with a frequent sideling of the head, indicating his watchfulness. He does not seem so diligent as the sylvians, because he waits for his prey to come to him, and seeks for it only by carefully awaiting its approach. That he is not idle is shown by his frequent flitting out in an irregular circuit, and immediately returning to his perch with a captured insect. These salient flights are very numerous, and he often turns a somerset in the act of capturing his prey. He seldom misses his aim, and probably collects from ten to fifteen insects of an appreciable size every minute. As he lives entirely upon them, and in summer gathers them for his offspring, this is no extravagant estimate.

The pewee, however, does not catch all his prey while it is flying, but he is usually on the wing when he takes it. If he finds a moth or a beetle upon a leaf or a branch, he seizes it while he is poised in the air. A sylvian would creep along the branch, and when near enough extend his neck forward to take it. The vireos, forming an intermediate genus between the sylvians and the true flycatchers, partake of the habits of each. Some of them are remarkable for a sort of intermittent singing while hunting for their food. The preacher, indeed, seems to make warbling his principal employment. He is never, apparently, very diligent or earnest, and often stops during his desultory exhortations, to seize a passing insect, and then resumes his song.

Woodpeckers reside chiefly in the forest, of which they are the natural guardians; and as the food of their choice is nearly as abundant in winter as in summer, they are not generally migratory. Hence the operations of these birds are incessant throughout the year. As their food is not anywhere very abundant, like that of some of the granivorous birds, woodpeckers never forage in flocks. The more they scatter themselves the better their fare. The woodpeckers bear the same relation to other birds that take their food from trees, as snipes and woodcocks bear to thrushes and quails. They bore into the wood as the snipe bores into the earth, while thrushes and quails seek the insects that crawl on the surface of the ground.

There are several families of birds that take only a small part of their food from trees, and the remainder from the soil or the greensward. Such are all the gallinaceous kinds, larks, blackbirds, and thrushes. It has been said that the skylark was never known to perch upon a tree. These families are the guardians of the soil. The thrushes do not refuse an insect or a grub that is crawling upon a tree, but they forage chiefly upon the surface of the ground. In the feeding habits of the thrushes, their apparent want of diligence attracts frequent attention; but this appearance is delusive. The common robin will exemplify their usual manner, though he carries it to an extreme. When he is hunting his food he is usually seen hopping in a listless manner about the field. Sometimes a dozen robins or more may occupy one enclosure, but they are always widely separated. Observe one of them and you will see him standing still, with his bill inclined upward, and looking about him with seeming unconcern; soon he makes two or three hops, and then stands a few more seconds with his bill turned upward, apparently idle. Presently he darts suddenly a few yards from his standing-place, and may be seen pecking vigorously upon the ground. If you were near him you would see him pulling out a cutworm, seldom an earthworm, or devouring a nest of insects which are gathered in a cluster.

Blackbirds, though they also gather all their food from the ground, seem to be more industrious. Blackbirds of all species walk. They do not hop like the robin. They seldom hold up their heads, but march along with their bills turned downward, as if entirely devoted to their task. They never seem to be idle, except when a flock of them are making a garrulous noise upon a tree. If a blackbird looks upward, it is only by a sudden movement; he does not stop. After watching a blackbird and a robin ten minutes in the same field, any one would suppose that the blackbird had collected twice as much food as the robin during that time. But this is not true. The difference in their apparent industry is caused partly by the character of their food. The robin is entirely insectivorous, while the omnivorous blackbird hunts the soil for everything that is nutritious, and picks up small seeds that require a close examination of the ground.

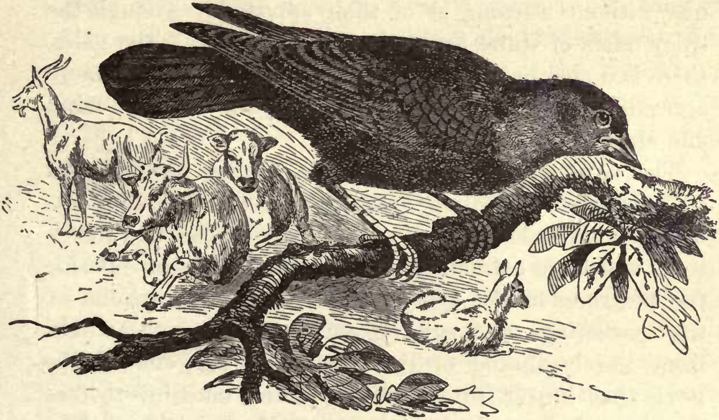
The robin is probably endowed with a greater reach of sight than the blackbird, and while hopping about with his head erect, his vision comprehends a wider space. Many a time have I been astonished at the rapidity with which one of these idle robins would collect cutworms during a dry spell when they could not be very abundant, sometimes bringing two at a time in her bill and carrying them to her young. The robin not only watches for a sight of his prey, but also for the marks upon vegetation that denote the place of its concealment. He must possess an extraordinary share of this sagacious instinct; for the thousands of cutworms destroyed by him could not be discovered except by these indications and when they crawl out at twilight. The robin is therefore one of the earliest as well as the latest feeders among all our birds in the morning and evening.

The foraging habits of the different species of domestic poultry are worthy of remark as illustrating some of the differences observed in the manners of wild birds. Place a brood of ducks in a field during grasshopper-time, and they generally pursue one course, marching in a body over the field with great regularity. A brood of chickens, on the contrary, will scatter, occasionally reassembling, but never keeping close together, unless they are following a hen. Turkeys scatter themselves less than chickens, but do not equal ducks in the regularity of their movements. Pigeons settle down upon a field in a compact flock, and then radiate in all directions. They pursue no regular march, like ducks.

A very interesting class of foragers are those that feed in compact assemblages. This habit renders the snow-buntings exceedingly attractive. Their food is not distributed in separate morsels like that of robins and woodpeckers. It consists of the seeds of grasses and of composite plants, which are often scattered very evenly over a wide surface. When, therefore, a flock of fifty or more settle down in a field, each one fares as well as if he were alone, during the short time they remain on the spot. Insect-feeders find it for the most part profitable to scatter and keep separate, because their food is sparsely distributed. This is not true of the birds that frequent the salt-marshes that are overflowed by the tide. Their aliment consists of insects and worms which are evenly scattered and abundant. Hence sandpipers and some other species forage in flocks, though they live exclusively upon an animal diet.

The swallow tribes are the guardians of the atmosphere, that would otherwise swarm with fatal quantities of minute insects. Their foraging habits are observed by all, and are well known. Woodpeckers, creepers, and chickadees are the guardians of the timber of the forest; sylvians and flycatchers, of the foliage. Blackbirds, thrushes, crows, and larks are the protectors of the surface of the soil; snipes and woodcocks, of the soil under the surface. Each family has its respective duties to perform in the economy of nature; and man must beware lest he disturb this equilibrium by reducing the numbers of any species below the supply of insects which is afforded them.

It is curious to note the assiduity with which insects are hunted in all stages of their existence. In their larva state, those that lurk inside of the wood and bark are taken by woodpeckers, and those under the soil by snipes and woodcocks. Insects, when the larva has assumed the form of moths, beetles, and flies, are attacked by flycatchers and sylvians and other small birds that take their food by day, and by small owls and whippoorwills by night. It matters not in what stage of its existence the insect is destroyed; it is still demonstrable that these minute creatures cannot be kept in check unless they are attacked in all stages. Birds are their only effectual destroyers. Man cannot check their multiplication or their ravages by artificial means. He cannot even protect his garden. Their destructive and infinite multiplication can be prevented only by Nature's own agents, which she has created with this power. A million of ichneumons would not do the work of a dozen birds.



COWBIRD.

SEPTEMBER.

We have hardly become familiar with summer ere autumn arrives with its cool nights, its foggy mornings, and its clear brilliant days. Yet the close of summer is but the commencement of a variety of pleasant rural occupations, of reaping and fruit-gathering, and the still more exciting sports of the field. After this time we are comparatively exempt from the extremes of temperature, and we are free to ramble at any distance, without exposure to sudden showers, that so often spring up in summer without warning us of their approach. Though the spicy odors of June are no longer wafted upon the gales, there is a clearness and freshness in the atmosphere more agreeable than fragrance, giving buoyancy to the mind and elasticity to the frame.

The various employments of the farmer are changed into agreeable recreations; and the anxious toils of planting and haymaking have given place to the less wearisome and more exhilarating labors of the harvest. Beside the pleasures of the sportsman, there are successions of fruit-gatherings and rural excursions of various kinds, from the beginning of this month to the end of the next, that impart to the young many cheerful themes for remembrance during the rest of their days. The provident simpler may be seen upon the hills busily employed in gathering medicinal plants for her own humble dispensary. Close by her side are neatly bound sheaves of thoroughwort, hardhack, bear-berry, pennyroyal, and life-everlasting, which she benevolently provides for the supply of her neighborhood. And while thus employed, she feels the reward of the just in the pleasing contemplation of the good she may perform, when winter comes with its fevers and colds.

There is no season when the landscape presents so beautiful an appearance just before sunset, as during this month. The grass has a singular velvety greenness, being without any mixture of downy tassels and panicles of seeds. For the present covering of the fields is chiefly the second growth of vegetation, after the first has been mowed by the farmer or cropped by the grazing herds. The herbage displays little but the leaves, which have been thickened in their growth and made green by the early rains of autumn. When the atmosphere has its usual autumnal clearness and the sun is just declining, while his rays gleam horizontally over the fields, the plain exhibits the most brilliant verdure, unlike that of the earlier months. When this wide landscape of uniform greenness is viewed in opposition to the blue firmament, it seems as if the earth and the sky were vying with each other in the untarnished loveliness of their appropriate colors.

There is usually a serenity of the weather for the greater part of September, unknown to the other autumn months. Yet this is no time for inaction; for the temperate climate, too pleasant for confinement, and too cool for indolent repose, invites even the weary to ramble. Of all the months, the climate of September is the most equable and salubrious, and nearly the same temperature is wafted from every quarter of the heavens. The sea-breezes spring up from the ocean almost with the mildness of the southwest, and the rude north-wind has been softened into a delightful blandness by his tender dalliance with summer.

One of the charms of the present month is the profusion of bright-colored fruits that meet the eye on every side in the deserted haunts of the flowers. The scarlet berries of the nightshade, varied with their blossoms, hang like clusters of rubies from the crevices in the stone-walls through which the vines have made their clambering tour. On each side of the fences the elder-trees in interrupted rows are bending down with the weight of their dark purple fruit, and the catbird may be seen busily gathering them for his noonday repast. Above all, the barberry-bushes scattered over the hills, some in irregular clumps, others following the lines of the stone-walls, down narrow lanes and over sandy hills, with their long slender branches fringed with delicate racemes of variegated fruit, changing from a greenish white to a bright scarlet, form hedge-rows as beautiful as art, without its formality.

September is the counterpart of June, and displays the transformation of the flowers of early summer into the ripe and ruddy harvest. The wild-cherry trees are heavily laden with their dark purple clusters, and flocks of robins and waxwings are busy all the day in their merry plunder among the branches. But in the fruits there is less to be loved than in the flowers, to which imagination is prone to assign some moral attributes. The various fruits of the harvest we prize as good and bounteous gifts. But flowers win our affections, like beings endowed with life and thought; and when we notice their absence or their departure we feel a painful sense of melancholy, as when we bid adieu to living friends. With flowers we associate the sweetness, the loveliness, and the dear and bright remembrances of spring. Like human beings, they have contributed to our moral enjoyments. But there are no such ideas associated with the fruits, and while the orchards are resplendent with their harvest, they can never affect the mind like the sight of flowers.

BIRDS OF THE AIR.

All birds that take their food while on the wing, and seldom or not much in any other way, may be arbitrarily designated as Birds of the Air, whether their prey inhabit the air, like the insects taken by the Swallows and Flycatchers, or the cup of a flower, like those taken by the Humming-Bird. Of these the Swallows, including the Martin and the Swift, are the most conspicuous and most numerous in this part of the world. These birds have large wings, fly very swiftly, and without a great deal of apparent motion of their wings. It could hardly be explained on mechanical principles how they are able to pass through the air with such rapidity. While watching them on the wing, it seems as if they were never weary; but Daines Barrington says the Swallow makes frequent pauses for rest while engaged in the pursuit of insects.

THE BARN-SWALLOW.

This is the species with which the inhabitants of New England are best acquainted. But they are every year becoming fewer, and this diminution of their numbers is attributed by Mr. S. P. Fowler to our modern tight barns. Though they often build under the eaves of houses and in sheds, they find in these places but limited accommodations, compared with the old-fashioned barns that were formerly scattered over the whole country. There are now hundreds only where thirty years ago there were thousands, all swarming with these lively birds, who built their nests on the horizontal beams that supported the barn roof. The birds left us when they were deprived of their tenements, while the Cliff-Swallow, that builds under the eaves of barns and houses and under projecting cliffs of rocks, has increased, feeding upon the larger quantity of insects consequent upon the absence of the Barn-Swallow.

This species is of a social habit; fond of building and breeding, as it were, in small communities. An old-fashioned barn has been known to contain as many as two dozen nests. They are constructed of materials similar to those of a Robin's nest; but the Swallow adds to the lining of grass a few feathers, which the Robin does not use. Dr. Brewer alludes to a custom among the Barn-Swallows of building "an extra platform against, but distinct from the nest itself, designed as a roosting-place for the parents, used by one during incubation at night or when not engaged in procuring food, and by both when the young are large enough to occupy the whole nest." The eggs of the Barn-Swallow are nearly white, with a fine sprinkling of purple. Two broods are reared in a season. When the bird appears to have a third brood I think it must have happened from the accidental destruction of the second brood of eggs.

THE CLIFF-SWALLOW.

The Cliff-Swallow is the species that has apparently filled the vacancy made by the diminished numbers of the Barn-Swallow. It is a smaller bird and more whitish underneath. The nests of this species are placed under the eaves of houses, sometimes extending nearly across the whole side of a roof, resembling in some degree a long row of hornets' nests. The nest is of a roundish shape; the body of it is plastered to the wood; the entrance is the neck, slightly covered for protection from rain. They are made of clay and mud without intermixture of other substances. They are lined with grass and feathers.

This species was at the early settlement of the country so rare, in this part of the continent, that it escaped the notice of some of the earliest observers of the habits of our birds. It was not known even to Alexander Wilson. It seems to have been observed and described in Maine before it was well known in any of the other States. Dr. Brewer says of this species: "I first observed a large colony of them in Attleborough (Mass.) in 1842. Its size indicated the existence of these birds in that place for several years. The same year they also appeared in Boston, Hingham, and in other places in the neighborhood." The notes of this Swallow are not so agreeable as those of the Barn-Swallow and other species.

THE WOOD-SWALLOW.

The White-bellied Swallow is known in the British Provinces by the name of "Wood-Swallow." This will be regarded a very appropriate designation, when we consider the continuance of the primitive habits of this bird of building in hollow trees. Samuels has seen great numbers of the nests of this species in the woods of Maine, near the northern lakes, built in hollow trees, some of them standing in water. In an area of about ten rods he counted fifty nests. He says this species is the most common of the Swallows in that region. The nests are formed entirely of grass and feathers without any mud, for which there is no necessity. The eggs are pure white.

This species has superseded the Purple Martin in many parts of New England, as the Cliff-Swallow has superseded the Barn-Swallow. They are pretty generally distributed over the whole continent, though, notwithstanding the primitive habits that still adhere to a great part of their numbers, they are most numerous in cities and their suburbs, attracted probably by the vast multitudes of small flies, which are more abundant than in the woods. The Cliff-Swallow breeds as far as the Arctic Seas.

THE SAND-MARTIN.

This is not the least interesting of the family of Swallows. The swarming multitudes that often assemble in one vicinity, their constant motions while going in and out their holes in the sand-bank, and sailing about on rapid wing in quest of their microscopic prey, and their lively notes render them objects of frequent attention. Of all the Swallows the Sand-Martins afford the most amusement for small boys in the vicinity, who employ themselves in digging out their nests, which are sometimes less than two feet under the surface. The difficulty is in finding the exact spot where the excavation should be made. Large multitudes of them formerly assembled every year and made their holes in the high sand-bluffs that surround the Beverly coast. I have counted over fifty holes in one large and high bank.

"The work of preparation," says Dr. Brewer, "they perform with their closed bill, swaying the body round on the feet, beginning at the centre and working outwards. This long and often winding gallery gradually expands into a small spherical apartment, on the floor of which they form a rude nest of straw and feathers. The time occupied in making these excavations varies greatly with the nature of the soil, from four or five days to twice that number."

THE PURPLE MARTIN.

It is seldom in these days we hear the sweet hilarious notes of the Purple Martin in Eastern Massachusetts. From some not very accountable cause the species have left many of their former habitations, and we are no longer pleasantly roused from our sleep by their sportive garrulity near our dwellings. The absence of these birds is a truly sorrowful bereavement. When I visit the places where I formerly heard them and note their absence, I feel as I do when strolling over some old familiar ground upon which every scene has been changed, where wood has become open space, old houses are removed and replaced by new, and strangers occupy the homes of the old inhabitants.

We no longer see any large assemblages of Purple Martins in Eastern Massachusetts; and in almost all parts of New England, where they were formerly the most common of our birds, their numbers are greatly diminished. Why, it may be asked, have they so generally left these parts, especially the vicinity of Boston? May it not be that the Wood-Swallows, which have multiplied in the same ratio as the Purple Martins have decreased, have been the cause of their disappearance? They breed in the boxes formerly used by the Martins, who, upon their later arrival, finding them preoccupied by the Wood-Swallow, and failing to obtain other accommodations, fly away to another vicinity. In a contest for a box the Purple Martin would be the victor, but would prefer seeking a habitation elsewhere to making an attempt to dislodge birds which had already built their nests there.

The Purple Martin is the largest of the American Swallows, with plumage of a bluish-black intermingled with purple and violet. In beauty it is not surpassed by any of the species. It seems to have no fear of man, who from immemorial time has protected it. The aboriginal inhabitants set hollowed gourds upon the trees to draw the Martins to their huts. And when the white man came, he provided them with a meeting-house, considering it a fitting structure for their musical congregations.

The Purple Martin utters a series of notes which are so varied and continued as to deserve to be called a song. This song has attracted less attention from those who have described the habits of our birds than it merits. In my early days I have listened for hours to the peculiar notes of the Purple Martin, in which a variety of chattering and chuckling is combined with a low guttural trill, resembling certain parts of the song of the Red-Thrush. The Martin, however, does not give himself up to song. His notes are heard chiefly while on the wing; but they are almost incessant. He is constantly in motion, and his song seems to me one of the most animated and cheerful sounds uttered by any American bird except the Bobolink.

The flight of the Purple Martin and his peculiar ways render him exceedingly interesting and amusing. Surpassed by no bird in swiftness, there is none that equals him in the beauty of his movements on the wing, uniting grace and vivacity in a remarkable degree. Often skimming the surface of ponds, or swiftly gliding along a public road a few feet from the ground, then soaring above the height of the lower clouds, he sails about with but little motion of the wings, till he is out of sight. These flights seem to be made for his own amusement; for it cannot be supposed that he finds the larger insects that constitute his prey at so great a height.

The boldness displayed by the Purple Martin in driving Hawks and Crows from his neighborhood accounts for the respect in which he was held by the Indians, who were great admirers of courage. " So well known," says Wilson, "is this to the lower birds and to the domestic poultry, that as soon as they hear the Martin's voice engaged in fight, all is alarm and consternation." The Martin is often victor in contests with the Kingbird, perhaps when one is tired of the contest another takes his place with fresh vigor, so that the Kingbird is finally driven away and conquered.

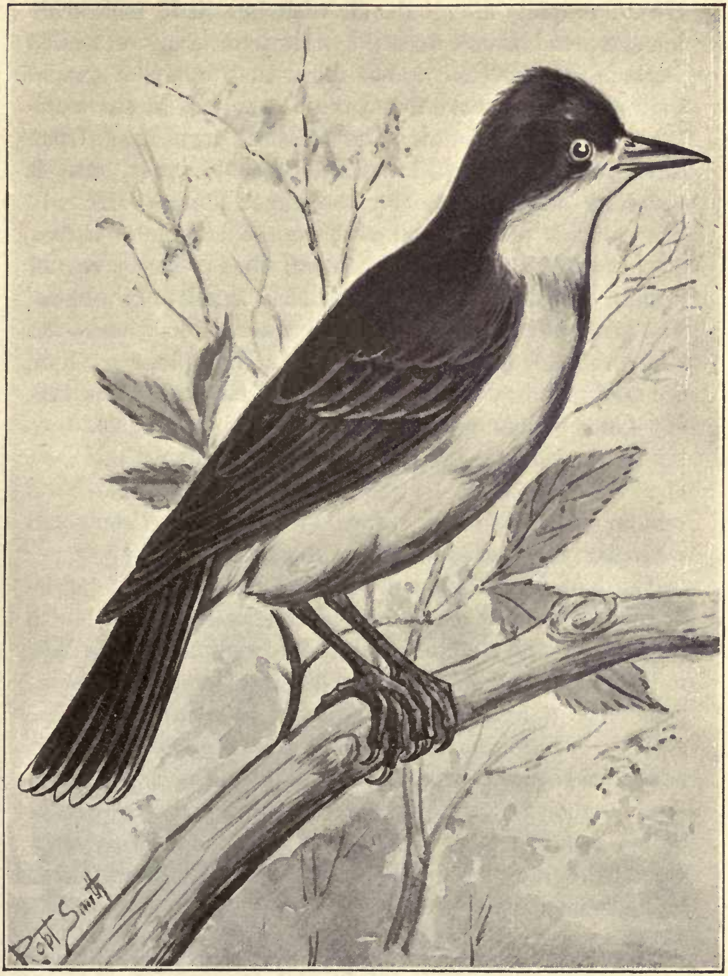
THE CHIMNEY-SWALLOW.

The Chimney-Swallow attracts general attention on account of its practice of building its nest in the unused flue of a chimney. In village and town this family of birds are very abundant, some deserted chimney being always appropriated for the rearing of their young. It is remarkable that their desertion of their original breeding-places and their present selection of chimneys should be so universal. Though they are known at the present time to build, as formerly, in hollow trees, they do so only in forests very distant from town or village. It cannot be said that they are fond of the companionship of man. The small flies that constitute their food are probably more numerous in towns than in forests. Hence the birds for convenience resort to the chimney rather than the hollow tree, which is farther from their supplies of food.

The Chimney-Swallow is the smallest of our American species, and is partially nocturnal in its habits, being most active during morn and early twilight. Its nests are nicely woven with sticks, fastened to the chimney with a glutinous saliva. Says Samuels: "About sunset, great multitudes of these birds are out, and the numbers of insects they destroy must be immense. Everywhere they may be seen; away up in the blue sky, as far as the eye can reach, they are coursing in wide-extended circles, chasing each other in sport, and even caressing and feeding their mates while on the wing. A little lower they are speeding over the tops of trees, gleaning the insects that have just left the foliage; over the surface of the lake or river they fly so low, in the pursuit of aquatic insects that their wings often touch the water. Everywhere are they busy."

THE KINGBIRD OR BEE-MARTIN.

The true Flycatchers take all their food while it is flying in the air, though they do not sail round, like a Swallow, to catch it. They are commonly seated quietly on their perch, and seize it by sallying out a few yards, and then returning. If we watch the ways either of the Kingbird or the Pewee, we shall observe this peculiar habit of all the Flycatchers. One of the most common of our birds, well known by his lively manners, his shrill notes, and twittering flight; always apparently idle, sitting on the branch of a tree as if he were a sentinel of the field, is the Kingbird. From this branch you may observe his frequent sallies when darting upon his prey. You may often see him pursuing a Hawk or a Crow, and annoying it by repeated attacks, always made in the rear of his victim. His usual custom is to rise a little above the object of his harassment, and then swoop down in such a manner that the bird cannot turn upon him. I have frequently seen him rise almost out of sight when engaged in such encounters. His victim constantly endeavors to rise above his pursuer, while the Kingbird by his activity as invariably balks him. I could never determine which of the two was the first to tire. But the Kingbird may probably be relieved by another of his species who may take his place. This pugnacious habit is said to continue only during the breeding-season.



KING BIRD

It is amusing to watch his movements when flying. He sails rapidly along the air with but little motion of his outspread wings, save the vibrations of his extended feathers, all the time screaming with a sharp and rapid twitter. You observe this habit of the bird at short distances from the ground, when pursuing an insect. Upon seizing it he returns immediately to his post. He is watching all the while for the larger insects. He will not quit his perch, upon a fence, the branch of a tree, or a mullein-stalk, to catch small flies. He leaves all minute insects to the Swallows and small Flycatchers. The farmers complain of him as a bee-eater, whence the name of Bee-Martin which is often applied to him. Some observers say he discriminates between the different kinds of bees, selecting only the drones for his repast. But among the offences charged against him, he is never accused of stealing grain or fruit. Hence he is seldom molested, and enjoys great security compared with many other equally useful birds.

The Kingbird has not much beauty of plumage ; but he is so neatly marked with black and white, with a bluish color above, and a white band at the extremity of his dark tail-feathers, and he displays his form and plumage so gracefully in his vibrating flights, that he cannot escape notice. The crest, containing a vermilion centre, is hardly discernible, save when the bird is excited, when it is slightly elevated. The Kingbird more frequently builds in an orchard than in a wood, an open cultivated place being more productive of those insects which afford him subsistence.

THE PEWEE.

If we stroll at any hour of the day in summer and sit under a rustic bridge for coolness or shelter, while watching the stream and listening to its flow, we may hear the plaintive cry of the Pewee, a common but retiring bird, whose note is familiar to all. He seems to court solitude, though he has no apparent fear in the presence of man ; and his singular note harmonizes with the gloominess of his retreat. He sits for the most part in the shade, catching his insect prey without any noise, but after seizing it, resuming his station. This movement is performed in the most graceful manner; and he often turns a somerset or appears to do so, if the insect at first evades his pursuit. All this is done in silence, for he is no singer. The only sound he utters beside his *lament* is an occasional clicking chirp. All the day, after short intervals, with a plaintive cadence he modulates the syllables *pe-wee.* As the male and the female can hardly be distinguished, I have not been able to determine whether this sound is uttered by both sexes or by the male only.

So plainly expressive of sadness is this remarkable note, that it is difficult to believe the little creature that utters it can be free from sorrow. Certainly he has no congeniality with the sprightly Bobolink. Why is it that two simple sounds in succession can produce an effect on the mind as intense as a solemn strain of artificial music and excite the imagination like the words of poesy ? I never listen to the note of the Pewee without imagining that something is expressed by it that is beyond our ken ; that it sounds in unison with some one of those infinite chords of intelligence and emotion, which in our dreamy moments bring us undefinable sensations of beauty and mystery and sorrow. Perhaps with the rest of his species, the Pewee represents the fragment of a superior race which, according to the metempsychosis, have fallen from their original high position among exalted beings; and this melancholy note is but the partial utterance of sorrow that still lingers in their breasts after the occasion of it is forgotten!

Though a retiring bird, the Pewee is very generally known on account of his remarkable note, which is heard often in our gardens as well as in his peculiar habitats. Like the Cliff-Swallow, he builds his nest under a sheltering roof or rock, and it is often fixed upon a beam or plank under a bridge. There are no prejudices in the community against this species. They are not destroyed on any occasion. By the most ordinary observer they cannot be suspected of doing mischief in the garden. I should remark in this place, that the Flycatchers and Swallows and a few other species that enjoy immunity in our land, though multiplied to infinity, would perform only those offices which are assigned them by nature. It is a vain hope that while employed in exterminating any species of small birds their places can be supplied and their services performed by other species which are allowed to multiply to excess. The Swallow and the Pewee, with all their multitudinous families, will not perform the work of the Robin or the Woodpecker, nor can all these together do the work of the Sylvians.

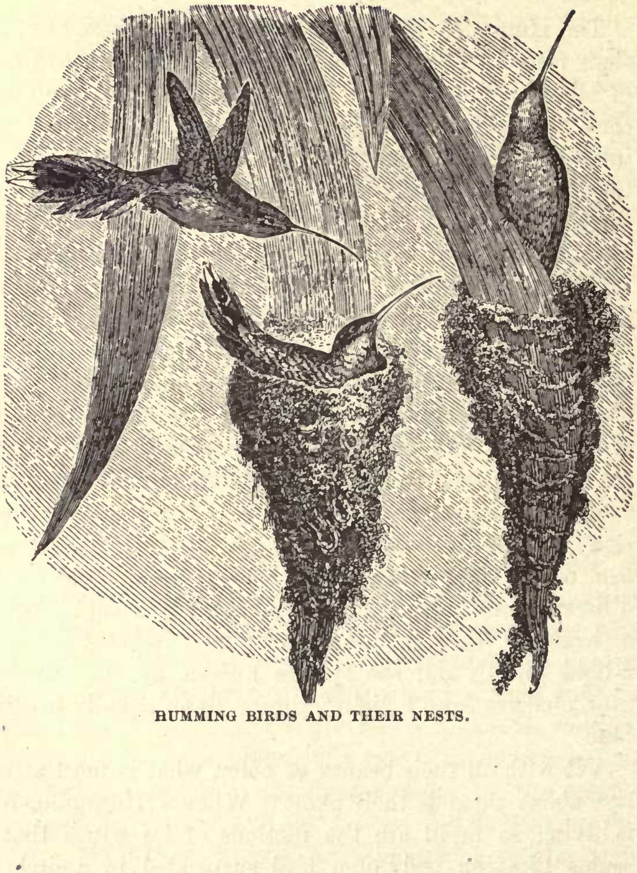
WOOD-PEWEE.

We seldom ramble in a deep wood without hearing the feeble and plaintive note of the Wood-Pewee, — a bird that does not leave the forest, and is therefore less known than the larger species that builds under bridges and the eaves of old houses. The Wood-Pewee places its shallow nest upon some large branch of a tree without any protection above it, and it is chiefly concealed by the resemblance of its materials to the mosses and lichens on the bough. Its habits, except its attachment to the solitude of the wood, differ but little from those of the common Pewee. It seems likewise to have the same cheerful manners. The minor notes of the two Pewees serve, more than any others equally simple, to harmonize the anthem of Nature.

THE HUMMING-BIRD.

The Humming-Birds, of which it is said there are more than four hundred species, are among the most exquisite of all animated beings. They unite the beauty and delicacy of a beautiful insect with the organization and intelligence of a creature of flesh and blood. Of all the feathered tribe, none will compare with them in the minuteness of their size. The splendor, variety, and changeableness of their hues are no less admirable than their diminutiveness. The colors of the rainbow do not surpass those of many of the species either in beauty or variety. A brilliant metallic lustre greatly enhances all this splendor. The variability of their hues, which is also observed in many other birds, is in the Humming-Birds almost unaccountable. Says Dr. Brewer: "The sides of the fibres of each feather are of a different color from the surface, and change as seen in a front or an oblique direction; and, while living, these birds by their movements can cause their feathers to change very suddenly to different hues. Thus the *Selasphorus rufus* can change in a twinkling the vivid fire color of its expanded throat to a light green; and the species known as the Mexican Star, changes from a light crimson to an equally brilliant blue."

Yet with all their beauty of color, what is most attractive about them is their flight. When a Humming-Bird is flying, so rapid are the motions of its wings that it seems like the body of a bird suspended in a circle of radiating sunbeams, or like one in the midst of a globe



HUMMING BIRDS AND THEIR NESTS.

of down, like that which surrounds the receptacle of a ripened dandelion flower. When we watch the flight of a short-winged bird like the Quail, the radiations formed by the rapid motions of its wings make only a semicircle. In the Humming-Bird they form a complete circle of luminous rays. This flight, which resembles that of certain insects, is the more remarkable on account of the extraordinary length of its wings, which would lead us to infer that they would be incapable of such rapid motion by the muscular force of so small a body. The wings of those moths and beetles which have a similar movement bear no proportion to the length of the Humming-Bird's wing, compared with the size of the body of the insect and of the bird. It is the rapid vibration of the wings, producing a sound like the spinning of a top, that has given to this family of birds the name by which they are designated.

While hovering before a flower, this hum is plainly audible; but when the bird darts off to another place the tone produced by these vibrations is plainly raised to a higher key, as it spins like an arrow through the air. Dr. Brewer, alluding to the Swiss philosopher Saussure, says: "On the first visit of this naturalist to a savanna in the island of Jamaica, he noticed what he at first took to be a brilliant green insect, of rapid flight, approaching him by successive alternations of movements and pauses, and rapidly gliding among and over the network of interlacing shrubs. He was surprised by the extraordinary dexterity with which it avoided the movements of his net, and yet more astonished to find, when he had captured it, that he had taken a bird and not an insect."

The largest known Humming-Bird is about the size of the Chimney-Swallow; and so great is the disparity in the size of the different species, that when confined in a cage, and the perch "has been occupied by the great

Blue-throated Humming-Bird, the diminutive Mexican Star has settled on the long beak of the former, and remained perched on it some minutes without its offering to resist the insult." Some of the species are so small that if they flew by night they might be swallowed alive by one of the smaller Owls as easily as a beetle.

The Humming-Bird was formerly supposed to feed entirely on the nectar of the flowers it was seen so constantly to visit. It is now well ascertained that its chief subsistence is made up of small insects which it takes from the flower. But the ancient opinion was not entirely a fallacy, since a portion of the nectar of the flower is taken with the insects, and supplies to the Humming-Bird that kind of nourishment which the larger insectivorous birds derive from fruit. Dr. Brewer says "the young birds feed by putting their own bills down the throats of their parents, sucking probably a prepared sustenance of nectar and fragments of insects." The bird uses his tongue both for capturing insects and for sucking the drops of dew and nectarine juices contained in the flower.

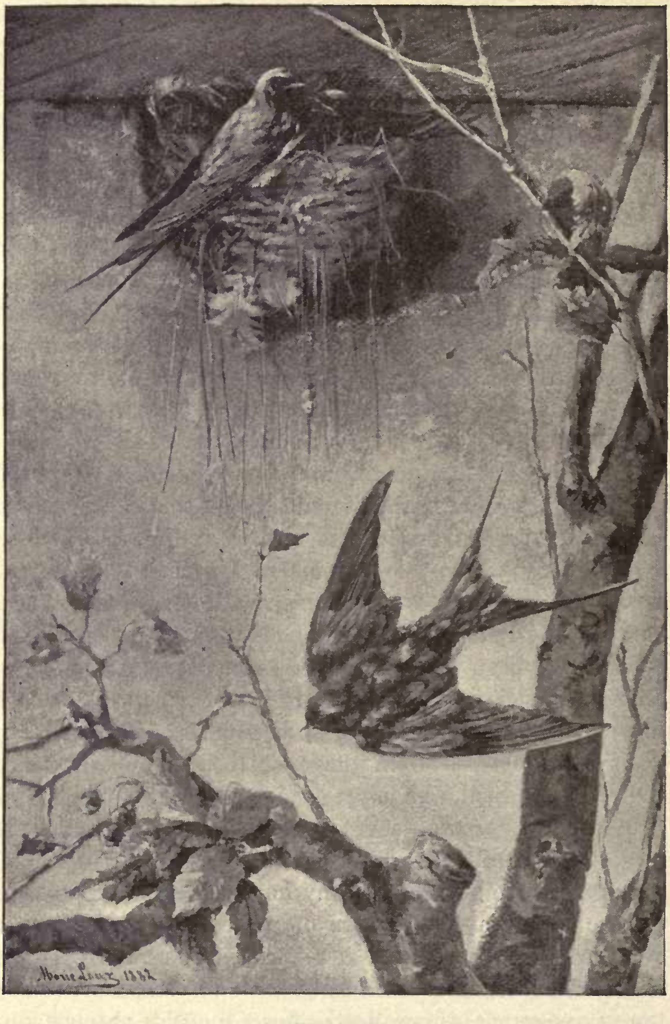
Notwithstanding the small size of the whole tribe of Humming-Birds, they are notoriously the most courageous and combative birds in existence. Their sharp bills, their rapid flight, the electric quickness of their manœuvres, render them so dangerous that no bird whom parties of them choose to attack can escape unharmed.

I once discovered a nest of the Humming-Bird in my own garden, upon the horizontal bough of an old apple-tree. It was placed near the end of the bough, about five feet from the ground. It was built, as all writers have described other nests of Humming-Birds, of ferns and mosses, with lichens glued together, perhaps from being collected while they were damp. It contained two eggs about the size of a pea-bean.

SWALLOWS: THEIR HIBERNATION.

There is not much that is interesting to be said of swallows, which are not singing-birds, and do not by their aerial flights attract attention, as if they were seen creeping on the branches of trees, and associated with their flowers. We watch with admiration their rapid movements through the air, their horizontal flight along the surface of some still water, and are charmed with their twittering when assembled round their nests. There was once a lively controversy in relation to the manner in which swallows pass the winter. The opinion of naturalists in Sweden and in the North of Europe, among whom we may name Linnæus and Kalm, was that swallows buried themselves in water under the freezing-line, or slept in the crevices of rocks. This theory has been discarded by modern naturalists, who have authentic accounts of flocks of swallows which have settled upon the masts and sails of ships when on their passage to or from the countries where they pass the winter. Still, the mystery is not cleared up.

White of Selborne mentions a week in March that was attended by very hot weather, when many species of insects came forth, and many house-swallows appeared. On the immediate succession of severe cold weather, the swallows disappeared and were seen no more until April. He mentions another instance recorded in his journal, of the reappearance of swallows after a month's absence, on the 4th of November, just for one day, which was remarkably warm, playing about at their leisure, as if they were



SWALLOWS.

near their place of retreat. On the same day, more than twenty house-martins appeared, which had retired without exception on the 7th day of the October previous. He adds that whenever the thermometer is above 50°, the bat flits out during any autumn or winter month. The author concludes that two whole species of swallows, or at least a large proportion of them in Great Britain, never leave the island, but remain torpid in some place of retreat; for he remarks, "We cannot suppose that, after a month's absence, house-martins can return from Southern regions, *to appear for one morning in November;* or that house-swallows should leave the districts of Africa, to enjoy in March the transient summer of a couple of days."

Daines Barrington testifies that he has in many instances known martins to reappear during warm days in different parts of the winter, but he is not sure that he has ever seen swallows at such times. He thinks, therefore, that martins conceal themselves in crevices of rocks, from which on a warm day they can emerge; but swallows, which are buried under water, cannot feel the influence of a short period of warm weather. The treatises on Ornithology written in the northern parts of Europe allude frequently, as if it were an established fact, to the submersion of swallows during the winter. Peter Brown, a Norwegian painter, informed Mr. Barrington that while he was at school near Sheen, he and his comrades constantly found swallows in numbers torpid under the ice that covered bays, and that they would revive if placed in a warm room. The author of a paper read before the Academy of Upsal mentions the submersion of swallows as a known fact in that part of the world. Among the superstitions associated with this belief, Pantoffidan relates that swallows before they sink under water sing the *Swallow Song,* as it is called, and which everybody knows.

A gentleman of science informed Mr. Barrington that when he was fourteen years of age, a pond belonging to his father, who was a vicar in Berkshire, was cleared out in February. While the workmen were clearing it, he picked up a cluster of three or four swallows that were caked in the mud, and they revived and flew about when carried to a warm room. Mr. Barrington records many similar facts, for which I have no space. In one instance swallows were taken out of a mass of solid ice, and were brought to life by the application of heat.

He thinks swallows only are ever submerged in water or mud, but that martins retire to fissures in rocks or to some lurking-places in the ground. He mentions a boatman who had seen thousands of martins in the crevices of a rock, and that they would revive when taken into a warm room. Kalm also relates, in his "Travels in America," that they have been found torpid in holes and clefts of rocks near Albany, New York. Mr. McKenzie, being at Lord Stafford's in Yorkshire, near the end of October, a conversation began about swallows crossing the seas. This the game-keeper disbelieved, and said he would carry any one to some neighboring coal-works, where he was sure of finding them at that time. Some of the servants attended him to the coal-pits, where several martins were found in a torpid state, but would show life when warmed.

Mr. Barrington concludes from all these facts that martins appear occasionally throughout the winter, when the weather is mild; but he had heard no well-attested cases of the reappearance of sand-martins during the winter; he cannot conjecture where they conceal themselves, but he is positive they do not winter in their holes. He expresses his belief in the impossibility of their making a journey across the seas to Africa, and doubts the few recorded instances of their alighting on the masts of vessels on their journeys of migration. If this theory of the migration of swallows be true, it must be true of those in the northern and southern parts of Asia. On the contrary, they hide themselves in the banks of the Ganges, during the three so-called winter months in that part of the world. Du Tertre mentions that the few swallows seen in the Caribbee Isles are only observed in summer, as in France. We are assured by Dr. Pallas, that not only are there swallows in Russia and Siberia, but that on the banks of the Wolga, latitude 57°, they disappeared about the fourth of August. These birds, according to the theory of migration, ought to have been passing to the more southern parts of Asia. Yet it has not been observed by any Asiatic traveller that they have the same species of swallow, or that they are seen in those parts during our winter.

As an objection to the theory of the torpidity of swallows as their mode of hibernation, it is asked where and when they moult, if not in regions south of Europe, as they do not moult before their disappearance. This is an objection that Mr. Barrington fails to answer. It is impossible, however, that their moulting can happen when submerged in water or torpid in some concealed resort. The functions of the animal economy would be unable to supply a new plumage while the system is in this state. I would suggest, if the theory of their torpidity were proved, that they may drop their feathers one by one, during all their active season of flight, as human hair is shed. Still, I cannot but think it more probable that swallows leave their northern habitats very early in the season, that they may arrive at their winter-quarters just before the season of moulting; and that the cause of their remaining undiscovered during their residence in the warm regions to which they resort is, that while moulting they live upon the ground in shelters of thicket, not being able to fly, and subsist upon a diet which they pick up from the ground.

But this does not explain the moulting of those swallows and martins, few or many, which have been proved to remain torpid in northern countries. Do these come out in the spring only to die, or do they perish in their winter retreats and never revive? If they are destined to perish here, why has Nature provided them with an instinct which answers no purpose whatever in their economy? If this submersion is only a method of suicide, why do they not perish immediately, instead of lingering along during the whole winter to die at the end of this season? And if they do not perish at this time, but awake and revive like bats and dormice, the most important question is, not where and when they moult, but why Nature has provided migration for a part of each swallow family, and a torpid sleep under water, and in crevices of rocks, for the remainder of the same families. I cannot but conclude that there is yet the greatest burden of proof remaining with those who maintain the theory of migration.

OCTOBER.

THE cool and temperate breezes that prevail at this time almost constantly from the west, attended with a clear sky, announce the brilliant month of October with a climate that alternately chills the frame with frosty vapors by night and enlivens the heart with beauty and sunshine by day. At sunrise the villagers are gathered round their fires shivering with cold; the chirping insects also have crept into their shelters and are silent. But ere the sun has gained half his meridian height the villagers have forsaken their fires, and are busy in the orchards beneath the glowing sunshine; and the insects, aroused from their torpor and warmed into new life, are again chirping as merrily as in August, and multitudes that could hardly creep with torpor in the morning are now darting and spinning in the grassy meadows.

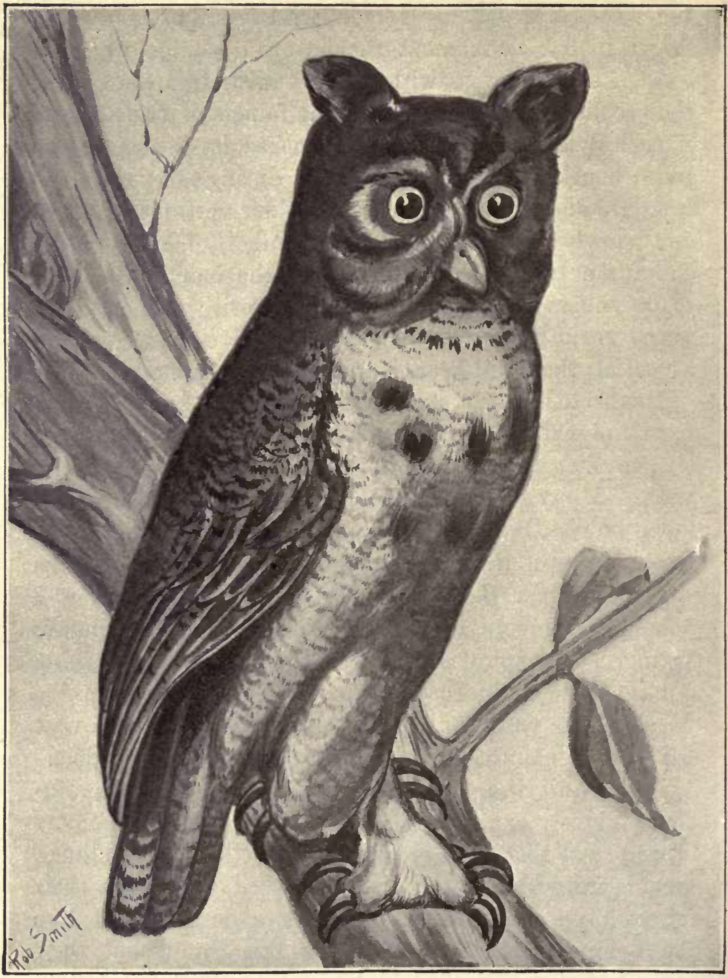
There are occasional dull and cloudy days in October, the dreary precursors of approaching winter; but they are generally bright and clear, and unequalled by those of any other month in salubrity. There are no sleeping mists drawn over the skies to obscure the transparency of the atmosphere; but far as the eye can reach, the distant hills lift up their heads with a clear, unclouded outline, and the blue arch of heaven preserves its deep azure down almost to the horizon. In the mornings of such days a white fleecy cloud is settled upon the streams and lowlands, in which the early sunbeams are refracted with all the myriad hues of dawn, forming halos and imperfect rainbows that seem to be pictured on a groundwork of drifted snow. By this vapor, nearly motionless at sunrise, we may trace the winding course of the small rivers far along through the distant prospect. But the sun quickly dissipates this fleecy cloud. As the winds float it slowly and gracefully over the plains, it melts into transparency; and ere the sun has gained ten degrees in his orbit, the last feathery fragment has vanished and left him in the clear blue firmament without one shadow to tarnish his glory.

October is the most brilliant of the months, unsurpassed in the clearness of its skies and in the wonderful variety of tints that are sprinkled over all vegetation. He who has an eye for beautiful colors must ever admire the scenery of this last month of foliage and flowers. As Nature loses the delicacy of her charms, she is more lavish of the gaudy decorations with which she embroiders her apparel. While she appears before us in her living attire, from spring to autumn she is constantly changing her vesture with each passing month. The flowers that spangle the green turf or wreathe themselves upon the trees and vines, and the herbage with all its various shades of verdure, constitute, with their successive changes, her spring and summer adornment; but ere the fall of the leaf she makes herself garlands of the ripened foliage, and crowns the brows of her mountains and the bosoms of her groves with the most beautiful array.

Though the present is a melancholy time of the year, we are preserved from cheerless reflections by the brightness of the sunshine and the interminable beauty of the landscape. The sky in clear weather is of the deepest blue; and the ocean and the lakes, slightly ruffled by the October winds, which are seldom tranquil, have a peculiar depth of coloring, unwitnessed when their surface is calm. Diverted by the unusual charms of Nature, while we look with a mournful heart upon the graves of the flowers, we turn our eyes upward and around us, where the woods are glowing like a wilderness of roses, and forget in our ravishment the beautiful things we have lost. As the flowers wither and vanish from our sight, their colors seem to revive in the foliage of the trees, as if each dying blossom had bequeathed its beauty to the forest boughs, that had protected it during the year. The trees are one by one putting aside their vestures of green and slowly assuming their new robes of many hues. From the beginning to the end of the month the landscape suffers a complete metamorphosis; and October may be said to represent in the successive changes of its aspect all the floral beauty of spring and summer.

Unaffected by the late frosts, the grass is still green from the valleys to the hill-tops, and many a flower is still smiling upon us as if there were no winter in the year. Many fair ones still linger in their cheerful but faded bowers, the emblems of contentment, seeming perfectly happy if they can but greet a few beams of sunshine to temper the frosty gales. In wet places I still behold the lovely neottia with its small white plumes arranged in a spiral line about their stems, and giving out the delicate incense of a lily. The purple gerardia, too, has not yet forsaken us, and the gentians will wait till another month before they wholly leave our borders.

If we quit the fields we find in the gardens a profusion of lovely exotics. Dahlias and fuchsias, and many other plants that were created to embellish other climes, are rewarding the hands that cherished them with their fairest forms and hues. All these are destined, not, like the flowers of our own clime, to live throughout their natural period, and then sink quietly into decay, but to be cut down by frosts in the very summer of their loveliness.



OWL

BIRDS OF THE NIGHT.

Numerous swarms of insects and many small quadrupeds that require darkness for their security come abroad only during the night or twilight. These creatures would multiply almost without check, were it not that certain birds, having the power of seeing in the dark, and being partially blinded by daylight, are forced to seek their food in the night. Many species of insects, not strictly nocturnal, — those in particular that pass their life chiefly in the air, — are most active after dewfall. Hence the very late hour at which certain species of Swallows retire to rest, the period of sunset and early twilight affording them a fuller repast than any other part of the day. No sooner has the Swallow gone to rest than the Night-Jar and Whippoorwill come forth to prey on the larger kinds of aerial insects. The bat, an animal of antediluvian type, comes out a little earlier, and assists in lessening these multitudinous swarms. The small Owls, though they pursue the larger beetles and moths, direct their efforts chiefly at the small quadrupeds that steal out in the twilight to nibble the tender herbs and grasses. Thus, the night, except the hours of total darkness, is with many species of animals, though they pursue their objects with great stillness and silence, a period of general activity.

The birds of the night may be classed under two heads, including, beside the true nocturnal birds, that go abroad in the night to seek their subsistence, those diurnal birds that continue their songs. There are other species that are quiet both at noonday and midnight. Such is the Chimney-Swallow. This bird employs the middle of the day in sleep after excessive activity from the earliest dawn. It is seen afterwards circling about at the decline of day, and is sometimes abroad in fine weather the greater part of the night, when the young require almost unremitted exertions on the part of the old birds to procure their subsistence.

The true nocturnal birds, of which the Owl and the Whippoorwill are prominent examples, are distinguished by a peculiar sensibility of the eye that enables them to see clearly by twilight and in cloudy weather, while they are dazzled by the broad light of day. Their organs of hearing are proportionally delicate and acute. Their wing-feathers have a peculiar downy softness, so that they move through the air without the usual fluttering sounds that attend the flight of other birds. Hence they are able to steal unawares upon their prey, and to make their predal excursions without disturbing the general silence of the hour. This noiseless flight is remarkable in the Owl, as may be observed if a tame one is confined in a room, when we can perceive his motions only by our sight. It is remarkable that this peculiar structure of the wing-feathers does not exist in the Woodcock, which is a nocturnal feeder. Nature makes no useless provisions for her creatures. Hence this bird, that obtains its food by digging into the ground and takes no part of it while on the wing, has no need of such a contrivance. Neither stillness nor stealth would assist him in digging for his helpless prey.

THE OWL.

Among the nocturnal birds the most celebrated is the Owl, of which there are many species, varying from the size of an Eagle down to the Acadian, which is no larger than a Robin. The resemblance of the Owl to the feline race has been a frequent subject of remark. Like the cat, he sees most clearly by twilight or the light of the moon, seeks his prey in the night, and spends the greater part of the day in sleep. This likeness is made stronger by his earlike tufts of feathers, that correspond with the ears of a quadruped; by his large head; his round, full, and glaring eyes, set widely apart; by the extreme contractility of the pupil; and by his peculiar habit of surprising his victims by watchfulness and stealth. His eyes are partially encircled by a disk of feathers, giving a remarkably significant expression to his face. His hooked bill, turned downwards so as to resemble the nose in the human face, the general flatness of his features, and his upright position produce a grave and intelligent look. It was this expression that caused him to be selected by the ancients as the emblem of wisdom and to be consecrated to Minerva.

The Owl is remarkable for the acuteness of his hearing, having a large ear-drum and being provided with an apparatus by which he can exalt this faculty when he wishes to listen with great attention. Hence, while he is noiseless in his own motions, he is able to perceive the least sound from the motion of any other object, and overtakes his prey by coming upon it in silence and darkness. The stillness of his flight adds mystery to his character, and assists in making him an object of superstitious dread. Aware of his defenceless condition in the bright daylight, when his purblindness would prevent him from evading the attacks of his enemies, he seeks some secure retreat where he may pass the day unexposed to observation.

It is this necessity which has caused him to make his abode in desolate and ruined buildings, in old towers and belfries, and in the crevices of dilapidated walls. In these places he hides from the sight of other birds, who regard him as a common enemy, and who show him no mercy when they have discovered him. Here also he rears his offspring, and we associate his image with these solitary haunts, as that of the Loon with our secluded lakes. In thinly settled and wooded countries, he selects the hollows of old trees and the clefts of rocks for his retreats. All the smaller Owls, however, seem to multiply with the increase of human population, subsisting upon the minute animals that accumulate in outhouses, orchards, and fallows.

When the Owl is discovered in his hiding-place, the alarm is given, and there is a general excitement among the small birds. They assemble in great numbers, and with loud chattering assail and annoy him in various ways, and soon drive him out of his retreat. The Jay, commonly his first assailant, like a thief employed as a thief-taker, attacks him with great zeal and animation. The Chickadee, the Nuthatch, and the Red-thrush peck at his head and eyes, while other birds less bold fly round him, and by their vociferation encourage his assailants and increase the terror of their victim.

It is while sitting on the branch of a tree or on a fence after his misfortune and escape that he is most frequently seen in the daytime. Here he has formed a subject for painters, who have generally introduced him into their pictures as he appears in one of these open situations. He is sometimes represented ensconced in his own select retreat, apparently peeping out of his hiding-place and only half concealed; and the discovery of him in such lonely places has caused the supernatural horrors attached to his image. His voice is supposed to bode misfortune, and his spectral visits are regarded as the forerunners of death. His occupancy of deserted houses and ruins has invested him with a romantic character, while the poets, by introducing him to deepen the force of their pathetic or gloomy descriptions, have enlivened our associations connected with his image; and he deserves therefore in a special degree to be classed among those animals which we call picturesque.

Though the Owl was selected by the ancients as the emblem of wisdom, the moderns have practically renounced this idea, which had its foundation in the gravity and not in the real character of the bird, which possesses only the sly and sinister traits that mark the feline race. A very different train of associations and a new series of picturesque images are now suggested by the figure of the Owl, who has been more correctly portrayed by modern poetry than by ancient mythology. He is now universally regarded as the emblem of ruins and of desolation, — true to his character and habits, which are intimately allied with this description of scenery.

I will not enter into a speculation concerning the nature and origin of those agreeable emotions which are so generally produced by the sight of objects that suggest ideas of ruins. It is happy for us that by the alchemy of poetry we are able to turn some of our misfortunes into sources of melancholy pleasure, after the poignancy of grief has been assuaged by time. Nature has also benevolently provided that many an object that is capable of communicating no direct pleasure to our senses shall affect us agreeably through the medium of sentiment. Thus, the image of the Owl awakens the sentiment of ruin; and to this feeling of the human soul we may trace the pleasure we derive from the sight of this bird in his appropriate scenery. Two Doves upon the mossy branch of a tree, in a wild and beautiful sylvan retreat, are the pleasing emblems of love and constancy; but they are not more suggestive of poetic fancies than an Owl sitting upon an old gate-post near a deserted house.

I have alluded in another page to the faint sounds we hear when the birds of night, on a still summer evening, are flying over short distances in a neighboring wood. There is a feeling of mystery awakened by these sounds that exalts the pleasure we derive from the delightful influence of the hour and the season. But the emotions thus produced are of a cheerful kind, slightly imbued with sadness, and not equal in intensity to the effects of the hardly perceptible sound occasioned by the flight of the Owl as he glides by in the dusk of evening or in the dim light of the moon. Similar in effect is the dismal voice of this bird, which is harmonized with darkness, and, though in some cases not unmusical, is tuned as it were to the terrors of that hour when he makes secret warfare upon the sleeping inhabitants of the wood.

THE ACADIAN OWL, OR SAW-WHETTER.

One of the most interesting of this family of birds is the little Acadian Owl, whose note formerly excited much curiosity. In the "Canadian Naturalist" an account is given of a rural excursion in April, when the attention of the party was called, just after sunset, to a peculiar sound heard in a cedar-swamp. It was compared to the measured tinkling of a cowbell, or to regular strokes upon a piece of iron quickly repeated. One of the party, who could not describe the bird, remembered that "during the months of April and May, and in the former part of June, we frequently hear after nightfall the sound just described. From its regularity it is thought to resemble the whetting of a saw, and hence the bird from which it proceeds is called the Saw-Whetter."

These singular sounds are the notes of the Acadian Owl. They are like the sound produced by the filing of a mill-saw, and are said to be the amatory note of the male, being heard only during the season of incubation.

Mr. S. P. Fowler informed me by letter that "the Acadian Owl has another note which we frequently hear in the autumn after the breeding season is over. The parent birds, then accompanied by their young, while hunting their prey in the moonlight, utter a peculiar note resembling a suppressed moan or low whistle. The little Acadian, to avoid the annoyance of the birds he would meet by day, and the blinding light of the sun, retires in the morning, his feathers wet with dew and rumpled by the hard struggles he has encountered in seizing his prey, to the gloom of the forest or the thick swamp. There, perched on a bough near the trunk of the tree, he sleeps through a summer's day, the perfect picture of a *used-up* little fellow, suffering the evil effects of a night's carouse."

THE SCREECH-OWL.

The Mottled Owl, or Screech-owl, is somewhat larger than the Acadian, or Whetsaw, but not so familiar as the Barn Owl of Europe, which he resembles. He builds in the hollows of old trees and in deserted buildings, whither he resorts in the daytime for repose and security. His voice is heard most frequently in the latter part of summer, when the young owlets are abroad. They use their cries for mutual salutation and recognition. The wailing note of this Owl is singularly wild and not unmusical. It is not properly a screech or a scream, like that of the hawk or the peacock, but rather a sort of moaning melody, half music and half bewailment. This plaintive strain is far from disagreeable, though it has a cadence expressive of dreariness and desolation. It might be performed on a fife, beginning with D octave and running down by quarter-tones to a third below, frequently repeating the notes with occasional pauses for about one minute. The bird does not slur his notes, but utters them with a sort of tremulous staccato. The separate notes may be distinctly perceived, though the intervals are hardly appreciable.

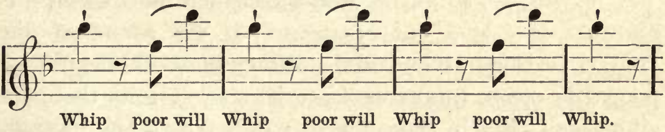
The generality of this family of birds cannot be regarded as useful. They are only mischievous birds of prey, and no more entitled to mercy or protection than the Falcons, to which they are allied. All the little Owls, however, though guilty of destroying small birds, are serviceable in ridding our fields and premises of mischievous animals. They destroy multitudes of large nocturnal insects, flying above the summits of trees in pursuit of them, while at other times their flight is low, when watching for mice and moles, that run upon the ground. It is on account of its low flight that the Owl is seldom seen upon the wing. Bats, which are employed by Nature for similar services, fall victims in large numbers to the Owls, which are the principal means of checking their multiplication.

An interesting family of nocturnal birds are the Moth-hunters, of which in New England there are only two species, the Whippoorwill and the Nighthawk. These birds resemble the Owls in some of their habits; but in their structure, their mode of obtaining subsistence, and in their general characters they resemble Swallows. They are shy and solitary, take their food while on the wing, abide chiefly in the deep woods, and come abroad only at twilight or in cloudy weather. They remain, like the Dove, permanently paired, lay their eggs on the bare ground, and, when perched, sit upon the branch lengthwise, unlike other birds. They are remarkable for their singular voices, and only one species — the Whippoorwill — may be considered musical. They are inhabitants of all parts of the world, but are particularly numerous in the warmer regions of North and South America, where the curiosity of the traveller is constantly excited by their voices resembling human speech.

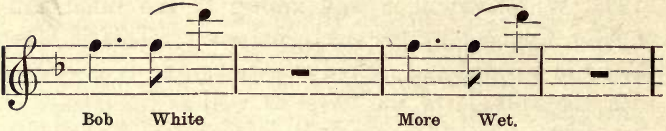
THE WHIPPOORWILL.

The Whippoorwill is well known to the inhabitants of New England by his nocturnal song. This is heard chiefly in wooded and retired situations, and is associated with the solitude of the forest as well as the silence of the night. The Whippoorwill is therefore emblematic of the rudeness of primitive nature, and his voice reminds us of seclusion and retirement. Sometimes he wanders away from the wood into the precincts of the town, and sings near our dwelling-houses. Such an incident was formerly the occasion of superstitious alarm, and was regarded as an omen of evil to the inmates of the dwelling. The cause of these irregular visits is probably the accidental abundance of a particular kind of insects which the bird has followed from the woods.

The Whippoorwill in this part of the country is first heard in May, and continues vocal until the middle of July. He begins to sing at dusk; and we usually hear his note soon after the Veery, the Philomel of our summer evenings, has become silent. His song consists of three notes, in a sort of polka-time, with a slight rest after the first note in each bar, as given below: —



I should remark that the bird begins his song with the second syllable of his name, if we may suppose him to utter the word, or I might say with the second note in the bar. Some birds occasionally, though seldom, fall short of these musical intervals, as they are written on the scale, and an occasional cluck is heard when we are near the singer. The notes of the Quail so clearly resemble those of the Whippoorwill that I give them below, that they may be compared.



So great is the similarity of the notes of these two birds, that those of the Quail need only be repeated in succession without pause to be mistaken, if heard in the night, for those of the Whippoorwill. They are uttered with a similar intonation; but the voice of the nocturnal bird is more harsh, and his song consists of three notes instead of two, and is pitched a few tones higher.

The song of the Whippoorwill, though wanting in mellowness of tone, as may be perceived when we are near him, is very agreeable except to a few, notwithstanding the superstitions associated with it. Some persons are not disposed to class the Whippoorwill among singing-birds, regarding him as more vociferous than musical. But it would be difficult to determine in what respect his notes differ from the songs of other birds, except that they approach more nearly to the precision of artificial music. Yet it will be admitted that a considerable distance is required to "lend enchantment" to the sound of his voice. In some retired and solitary districts, the Whippoorwills are so numerous as to be annoying by their vociferations. But in those places where only a few individuals are heard during the season, their music is a source of great pleasure, and constitutes one of the principal charms of the neighborhood.

I was witness of this some years ago, in one of my botanical rambles in Essex County, which is for the most part too open and cleared to suit the habits of these solitary birds. On one of these excursions, after walking several hours over a rather wild region I arrived at a very romantic spot, consisting of an open level, completely surrounded by woods. Nature uses her ordinary materials to form her most delightful landscapes, and causes them to rise up as it were by magic when we least expect them. Here I suddenly found myself encompassed by a charming amphitheatre of hills and woods, and in a valley so beautiful that I could not have imagined anything equal to it. A neat cottage stood with only one other in this spot. It was entirely wanting in any architectural decoration, which I am confident would have dissolved the spell that made the whole scene so attractive. It was occupied by a shoemaker, whom I recognized as an old acquaintance and a worthy man, who resided here with his wife and children, whose mode of living was one of the few vestiges of ancient simplicity. I asked them if they were contented while living so far from the town. The wife of the cottager replied that they suffered in the winter from their solitude; but in the warm season they preferred it to the town, "for in this place we hear all the singing-birds early and late, and the Whippoorwill sings every night during May and June." It was the usual habit of this bird, they told me, to sing both in the morning and evening twilight; but if the moon should rise late in the evening after it had become silent, it would begin to sing anew as if to welcome her rising. May the birds continue to sing to this happy family, and may the voice of the Whippoorwill never bode them any misfortune!

THE NIGHT-JAR.

The Night-Jar, or Nighthawk, is similar in many points to the Whippoorwill. The two, indeed, were formerly considered identical; but more careful investigation has proved them to be distinct species. I believe that some extraordinary pedant has also demonstrated that they belong to two distinct genera. Let us take heed that science do not degenerate, like metaphysics, into a mere vocabulary of distinctions which only the mind of a Hudibras can appreciate. The two birds, however, are not identical. The Nighthawk is a smaller bird, has no song, and exhibits many of the ways of the Swallow. He is marked by a white spot on his wings, which is very apparent during his flight. He seems to take his prey in a higher region of the atmosphere, being frequently seen, at twilight and in cloudy weather, soaring above the house-tops in quest of insects. The Whippoorwill finds his subsistence chiefly near the ground, flitting about the farmyard, the fences, and wood-piles, and taking an insect from a branch of a tree, while poising himself on the wing like a Humming-Bird. He is never seen circling aloft like the Nighthawk.

The movements of the Nighthawk during his flight are performed generally in circles, and are very picturesque. The birds are usually seen in pairs at such times, but occasionally there are numbers assembled together; and one might suppose they were engaged in a sort of aerial dance, and that they were emulating each other in their attempts at soaring to a great height. It is evident that these evolutions proceed in part from the pleasure of motion, but they are also a few of their ways during courtship. While they are soaring and circling in the air, they occasionally utter a shrill note which has been likened to the word *Piramidig,* forming a name by which the bird is sometimes called. Now and then they are seen to dart with a rapid motion to take a passing insect.

While performing these circumvolutions, the male occasionally dives perpendicularly downwards, through a considerable space, uttering, as he makes a sudden turn upwards at the bottom of his descent, a singular note resembling the twang of a viol-string. This sound has been supposed to be made by the action of the air as the bird dives swiftly through it with open mouth. This is proved to be an error by the fact that the European species makes a similar sound while sitting on its perch. Others think that this diving motion of the bird is designed to intimidate those who seem to be approaching his nest; but the bird performs the same manœuvre when he has no nest to defend. This habit is peculiar to the male, and it is probably one of those fantastic motions which are noticed among the male Doves as artifices to attract the attention of the female.

This twanging note, made during the precipitate descent of the Nighthawk through the air, is one of the picturesque sounds of Nature, and is heard most frequently in the morning twilight, when the birds are collecting their early repast of insects. If we should go abroad before daylight or at the earliest dawn, we might see them circling about, and hear their cry frequently repeated. Suddenly this twanging sound excites our attention, and if we were not acquainted with it or with the habits of the bird, we should feel a sensation of mystery, for there seems to be nothing like it in nature. The sound produced by the European species is a sort of drumming or whizzing note, like the hum of a spinning-wheel. The male begins this performance about dark, and continues it at intervals a great part of the night. It is effected while the breast is inflated with air, like that of a cooing Dove. The Nighthawk inflates its breast in a similar manner, and utters a similar sound when any one approaches the nest.

The habit of the Whippoorwill and Nighthawk of sitting lengthwise and not crosswise on their perch has excited some curiosity; for it is well known that these birds are capable of grasping a perch and sitting upon it. On the contrary, they roost upon a large and nearly horizontal branch in a longitudinal direction. The design of nature in this instinct is to afford the bird that concealment which is needful for its protection in the daytime. When thus placed, he is entirely hidden from sight below. The Owl is protected by another mode of concealment. He sits very erect, near the bole of the tree, and draws his tail-feathers right against the branch, so that he can hardly be seen from below. The Nighthawk, while reposing lengthwise upon his perch, would, if his foe were looking down upon him, hardly be distinguished when his mottled-brown plumage made no contrast in color with the bark of the tree.

THE MOCKING-BIRD.

I will now turn my attention to those diurnal birds that sing in the night as well as in the day, and are classed under the general appellation of Nightingales. These birds do not confine their singing to the night, like the Whippoorwill, and are most vocal by twilight and the light of the moon. Europe has several of these minstrels of the night, beside the true Philomel of poetry and romance. In the United States the Mocking-Bird enjoys the greatest reputation; but there are other birds of more solitary habits and less known, among which are the Rose-breasted Grosbeak and the Water-Thrush, that sing in the night.

The Mocking-Bird is well known in the Middle and Southern States, but seldom passes a season in New England, except in the southern extremity, which seems to be the limit of its northern residence. Probably like the Grosbeak, which is constantly extending its range in an eastern direction, the Mocking-Bird may be gradually making progress northwardly; so that fifty years hence each of these birds may be common in the New England States. The Mocking-Bird is familiar in his habits, frequenting gardens and orchards, and perching on the roofs of houses when singing, like the common Robin. Indeed, this bird owes much of his popularity to his familiar and amiable habits. Like the Robin, too, a bird that sings at all hours except those of complete darkness, he is a persevering songster, and seems to be inspired by living in the vicinity of man. In his manners, however, he bears more resemblance to the Red-Thrush, being distinguished by his vivacity and his courage in repelling the attacks of his enemies.

The Mocking-Bird is celebrated throughout the world for his musical powers; but it is difficult to ascertain precisely the character and quality of his original notes. Some naturalists affirm that he has no notes of his own, but confines himself to imitations. That this is an error, all persons who have listened to his native wild notes can testify. I should say, from my own observations, not only that he has a distinct song, peculiarly his own, but that his best imitations will bear no comparison with his native notes. His common habit during the day is to utter frequently a single strain, hardly distinguishable from that of the Red-Bird, and similar to that of the Baltimore Oriole. This seems to be his amusement while busy with the affairs of his own household and providing for their wants. It is only when confined in a cage that he is constant in his mimicry. In his native woods, and especially at an early hour in the morning, when he is not provoked to imitation by the notes of other birds and animals, he sometimes pours out his own wild notes with uninterrupted fervor. Yet I have often listened vainly for hours to hear him utter anything more than a few idle repetitions of monotonous sounds, interspersed with some ludicrous variations. Why he should discard his own delightful song to tease the listener with all imaginable discords is not easily explained.

Though his powers of mimicry are the cause of his fame, his real merit is not based upon these. He would be infinitely more valuable as a songster, if he were incapable of imitating a single sound. I would add that as an imitator of the songs of other birds he is very imperfect, and has been greatly overrated by our ornithologists, who seem to vie with each other in their exaggerations of his powers. He cannot utter correctly the notes of the rapid singers. He is successful only in his imitations of those birds whose notes are simple and moderately delivered. Hence he gives good imitations of the Robin. He is, indeed, more remarkable for his indefatigable propensity than for his powers, in which he is exceeded by some Parrots. Single sounds, from whatever source they may come, — from birds, quadrupeds, reptiles, or machines, — he delivers very accurately. But I have heard numbers of Mocking-Birds in confinement attempt to imitate the Canary without success. There is a common saying that the Mocking-Bird will die of chagrin if placed in a cage by the side of a caged Bobolink, mortified because he cannot give utterance to his rapid notes. If this would cause his death, he would also die when confined near a Canary or with any of the rapid-singing Finches. It is also an error to say of his imitations, as writers assert, that they are improvements upon the originals. When he utters the notes of the Red-Bird, the Oriole, or the common Robin, his imitations are perfect, but are no clearer or sweeter; and when he gives us the screaming of a Jay, the mewing of a cat, or the creaking of a cart-wheel, he does not change them into music.

As an original songster, estimated by the notes which on rare occasions he pours out in a serious mood from his own favorite spot and during his favorite hour, which is the earliest dawn, the Mocking-Bird is probably unequalled by any American songster. His notes are loud, varied, melodious, and of great compass. They may be likened to those of the Red-Thrush, more forcibly delivered, and having more flute-notes and fewer guttural notes and sudden transitions. He also sings often on the wing, and with fervor, while the other Thrushes sing only from their perch. But his song has less variety than that of the Red-Thrush, and falls short of it in some other respects. The Red-Thrush, however, has too little persistence in his singing.

By other writers the Mocking-Bird is put forward as superior to the Nightingale. This assumption might be worthy of consideration, if the American bird were not addicted to mimicry. This execrable habit renders him unfit to be compared with the Nightingale, whose song also resembles that of a Finch more than that of a Thrush. His mocking habits almost annihilate his value as a songster; as the effect of a concert would be spoiled if the players were constantly introducing, in the midst of their serious music, snatches of vulgar and ridiculous tunes and uncouth sounds.

TO THE MOCKING-BIRD.

Carolling bird, that merrily night and day
Tellest thy raptures from the rustling spray,
And wakest the morning with thy varied lay,
Singing thy matins; —
When we have come to hear thy sweet oblation
Of love and joyance from thy sylvan station,
Why in the place of musical cantation
Balk us with pratings?

We stroll by moonlight in the dusky forest
Where the tall cypress shields thee, fervent chorist!
And sit in haunts of echoes when thou pourest
Thy woodland solo.
Hark! from the next green tree thy song commences;
Music and discord join to mock the senses,
Repeated from the tree-tops and the fences,
From hill and hollow!

A hundred voices mingle with thy clamor;
Bird, beast, and reptile take part in thy drama;
Outspeak they all in turn without a stammer, —
Brisk Polyglot!
Voices of kill-deer, plover, duck, and dotterel;
Notes, bubbling, hissing, mellow, sharp, and guttural,
Of catbird, cat, or cart-wheel, thou canst utter all,
And all untaught.

The raven's croak, the chirrup of the sparrow,
The jay's harsh note, the creaking of a barrow,
The hoot of owls, all join the soul to harrow
And grate the ear.
We listen to thy quaint soliloquizing,
As if all creatures thou wert catechizing,
Tuning their voices, and their notes revising
From far and near.

Sweet bird, that surely lovest the "noise of folly,"
Most musical, but never melancholy;
Disturber of the hour that should be holy,
With sounds prodigious; —
Fie on thee! O thou feathered Paganini!
To use thy little pipes to squawk and whinny,
And emulate the hinge and spinning-jenny,
Making night hideous.

Provoking melodist! why canst thou breathe us
No thrilling harmony, no charming pathos,
No cheerful song of love, without a bathos?
The Furies take thee!
Blast thy obstreperous mirth, thy foolish chatter, —
Gag thee, exhaust thy breath, and stop thy clatter,
And change thee to a beast, thou senseless prater!
Naught else can check thee!

A lengthened pause ensues ; but hark again !
From the near woodland, stealing o'er the plain,
Comes forth a sweeter and a holier strain !
Listening delighted,
The gales breathe softly, as they bear along
The warbled treasure, the tumultuous throng
Of notes that swell accordant in the song,
As love is plighted.

The echoes, joyful, from their vocal cell,
Leap with the wingéd sounds o'er hill and dell,
With kindling fervor as the chimes they tell
To wakeful even :
They melt upon the ear ; they float away,
They rise, they sink, they hasten, they delay,
And hold the listener with bewitching sway,
Like sounds from heaven.

CALCULATIONS.

It is remarkable that in this "enlightened age" (I give the quotation-marks, lest I might be suspected of originating the expression) there should be a necessity of entering upon a course of argument to prove the utility of birds to agriculture. It is also surprising that the greatest enemies of birds are among men whose occupation would be ruined if they were for a single year wholly deprived of their services. There are many who plead for the birds as beautiful and interesting objects, deserving protection for their own sake. But, valuable as they are for their songs, their gay plumage, and their amusing habits, all these qualities are of minor importance compared with the benefits they confer upon man, as checks to the overmultiplication of insects. The trees and the landscapes are made greener and the flowers more beautiful in the spring, the fruits of autumn finer and more abundant, and all nature is preserved in freshness and beauty by these hosts of winged musicians, who celebrate their garrulous revelries in field and wood.

I believe it admits of demonstration, that if birds were exterminated man could not live upon this earth. Almost every one of the smaller species is indispensable to our agricultural prosperity. The gunner who destroys ten small birds in the spring preserves as many millions of injurious insects to ravage our crops and render barren our orchards. Naturalists are unanimous in declaring the importance of their services; but cultivators, who of all persons ought to be most familiar with the facts that prove their usefulness, are indeed the most ignorant of them. They attribute to them a full moiety of the injury occasioned by insects; yet there is not an insect in existence which is not the natural food of certain birds, and which would multiply to infinity if not kept in check by them.

Men are willing and eager to keep dogs and cats, to feed and protect them, and endure their annoyances, because they understand that their services in a variety of ways, both in the house and out of doors, are sufficient to compensate for all their mischief and their trouble. They can appreciate their value, and are willing to overlook their offences. But the birds, who sing and make themselves agreeable in thousands of ways, men will destroy, because they are either too ignorant or too stupid to understand the benefits they derive from them. Probably the cats and dogs in this country cost in the aggregate a million of dollars in feeding them, to say nothing of their troublesomeness, to one hundred dollars which the whole feathered tribe costs us by the fruit and grain they damage and consume.

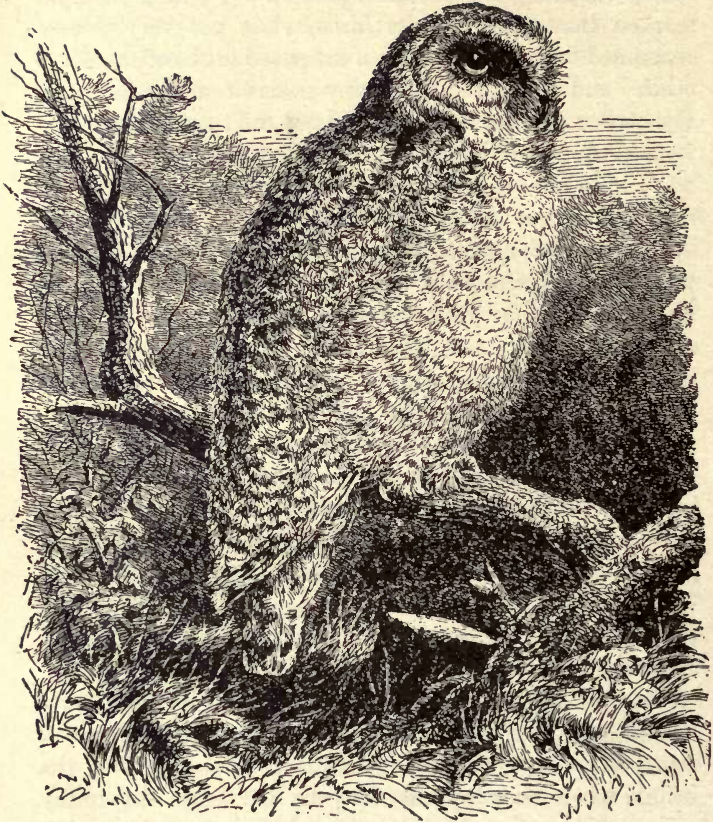
Calculations have been frequently made to ascertain the probable amount of insects consumed by any single bird. Many of these accounts are almost incredible, yet the most of them will admit of demonstration. Two different methods have been adopted for ascertaining these facts. The investigators watch the birds, to learn their food by their habits of feeding or foraging; or they destroy single birds at different times and seasons and examine the contents of their crop. Mr. Bradley, an English writer, mentions a person who was led by curiosity to watch a pair of birds that were raising a young brood, for one hour. They went and returned continually, bringing every time a caterpillar to the nest. He counted the journeys they made, and calculated that one brood did not consume less than five hundred caterpillars in the course of the day. The quantity destroyed in thirty days, at this rate, by one nest would amount to fifteen thousand. Suppose every square league of territory contained one hundred nests of this species, there would be destroyed by them alone in this space a million and a half of caterpillars in the course of one month.

I was sitting at a window one day in May, when my sister called my attention to a Golden Robin in a black-cherry tree employed in destroying the common hairy caterpillars that infest our orchards, and we counted the number he killed while he remained on the branch. During the space of one minute, by a watch, he destroyed seventeen caterpillars. I observed that he did not swallow the whole insect. After seizing it in his bill, he set his foot upon it, tore it asunder, and swallowed an atom taken from the inside. Had he eaten the whole caterpillar, three or four would probably have satisfied his appetite. But the general practice of birds that devour hairy caterpillars is to eat only a favorite morsel. Hence, they require a greater number to satisfy their wants.

This fact led me to consider how vast an amount of benefit this single species must contribute to vegetation. Suppose each bird to pass twelve out of the twenty-four hours in seeking his food, and that one hour of this time is employed in destroying caterpillars. At the rate of seventeen per minute, each bird would destroy a little more than one thousand caterpillars daily while they were to be found. Yet, if the crop of the bird were dissected, it would not be possible to discover from these titbits the character of the insect which he had devoured. So I draw the inference that while we may discover many important facts by dissection, all are not revealed to us by this mode of examination. Imagine, however, from the facts which I have recounted, the vast increase of caterpillars that would follow the extinction of this single species.

It is recorded in "Anderson's Recreations," that a curious observer, having discovered a nest of five young jays, remarked that each of these birds, while yet very young, consumed daily at least fifteen full-sized grubs of the May-beetle, and would require many more of a smaller size. The writer conjectures that of large and small each bird would require about twenty for its daily supply. At this rate the five birds would consume one hundred. Allowing that each of the parents would require fifty, the family would consume two hundred every day, and the whole amount in three months would be about twenty thousand. This seems to me from my own experience a very moderate calculation.

In obedience to an almost universal instinct, the granivorous birds, except those that lead their brood around with them like the hen, feed their young entirely upon the larva of insects. The finches and sparrows are therefore insectivorous, with but a few exceptions, the first two or three months of their existence. They do not consume grain or seeds until they are able to provide for themselves. The old birds supply their young with larva, when this kind of food is abundant, and when the tender state of their digestive organs requires the use of soft food. According to Mr. Augustus Fowler, who is good authority for any original observations, the American Goldfinch waits, before it builds a nest, until it is so late that the young, when they appear, may be fed with the milky grains and seeds of plants. It should be added that doves and pigeons soften the grain in their own crop before they give it to their young.



THE SNOWY OWL.

WHY BIRDS SING IN THE NIGHT.

In connection with this theme, we cannot escape a feeling of regret, almost like sorrow, when we reflect that the true nightingale and the skylark — the classical birds of European literature — are strangers to our fields and woods. In May and June there is no want of sylvan minstrels to wake the morn and to sing the vespers of a quiet evening. A flood of song awakens us at the earliest daylight; and the shy and solitary veery, after the vesper bird has concluded his evening hymn, pours his few pensive notes into the very bosom of twilight, and makes the hour sacred by his melody. But after twilight is sped and the moon rises to shed her meek radiance over the sleeping earth, the nightingale is not here to greet her rising, and to turn her melancholy beams into brightness and gladness. When the queen moon is on her throne, "clustered around by all her starry Fays," the whippoorwill alone brings her the tribute of his monotonous song, and soothes the dull ear of night with sounds which, however delightful, are not of heaven.

We have become so familiar with the lark and the nightingale by perusing the romance of rural life, that "neither breath of Morn when she ascends" without this the charm of her earliest harbinger, nor "silent Night" without her "solemn bird," seems holy as when we read of them in pastoral song. Poetry has hallowed to our minds the pleasing objects of the Old World. Those of the New must be cherished in song many more years before they can be equally sacred to the imagination.

The *cause* of the nocturnal singing of birds that do not go abroad during the night, and are strictly diurnal in all their other habits, has never been rationally explained. It is natural that the whippoorwill, which is a nocturnal bird, should sing during his hours of wakefulness and activity, and we may explain why ducks and geese, and other social birds, should utter their alarm-notes when they meet with any midnight disturbance. The crowing of a cock bears still more analogy to the song of birds; for it is certainly not a note of alarm. This domestic bird might therefore be considered a nocturnal songster, though we do not hear him at evening twilight. The cock sings his matins, but not his vespers. He crows at the earliest dawn and at midnight when he is wakened by the light of the moon, and by artificial light. Many birds are accustomed to prolong their notes after sunset to a late hour, and become silent only to begin anew at the earliest daybreak. But the habit of singing in the night is peculiar to a small number of birds, and the cause of it is a curious subject of inquiry.

By what means are they qualified to endure such extreme watchfulness, — singing and providing for their offspring during the day, then becoming wakeful and musical during the night? Why do they take pleasure in singing when no one will come in answer to their call? Have they their worship like religious beings; and are their midnight lays but the fervent outpouring of their devotions? Do they rejoice like the clouds in the presence of the moon, hailing her beams as a pleasant relief from the darkness that has surrounded them? Or, in the silence of the night, are their songs but responses to the sounds of the trees, when they bow their heads and shake their rustling leaves to the wind? When they listen to the streamlet that makes audible melody in the hush of night, do they not answer to it from their leafy perch?

And when the moth flies hummingly through the recesses of the wood, and the beetle winds his horn, what are the notes of the birds but cheerful counterparts to those sounds that break sweetly upon the quiet of their slumbers?

Wilson remarks that the hunters in the Southern States, when setting out on an excursion by night, as soon as they hear the mocking-bird, know that the moon is rising. He quotes a writer who supposes that it may be fear that operates upon the birds when they perceive the owls flitting among the trees, and that they sing as a timid person whistles in a lonely place to quiet their fears. But if such be the case, Nature has implanted in them an instinct that might lead to their destruction. Fear would instinctively prompt them to be quiet, if they heard the stirring of owls; for this feeling is not expressed by musical notes, but by notes of alarm, or by silence. The moonlight may be the most frequent exciting cause of nocturnal singing; but it is not true that birds always wait for the rising of the moon; and if it were so, the question still occurs, why a few species only should be thus affected.

Since philosophy cannot explain this instinct, let fancy come to our aid, as when men vainly seek from reason an explanation of the mysteries of religion they humbly submit to the guidance of faith. With fancy for our interpreter we may suppose that Nature has adapted the works of creation to our moral as well as our physical wants; and while she has instituted the night as a time of general rest, she has provided means that shall soften the gloomy effects of darkness. The birds, which are the harbingers of all rural delights, are hence made to sing during twilight; and when they cease, the nocturnal songsters become vocal, bearing pleasant sensations to the sleepless, and by their lulling melodies prepare us to be keenly susceptible to all agreeable emotions.

CHANGES IN THE HABITS OF BIRDS.

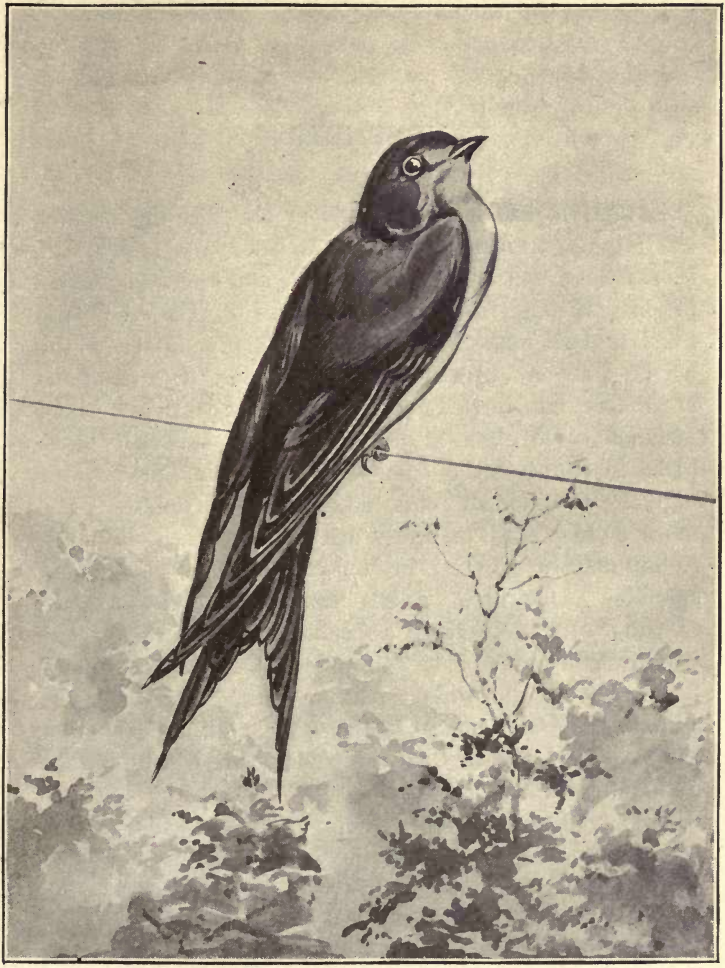
Birds acquire new habits as certain changes take place upon the surface of the country that create a necessity for using different modes of sheltering and protecting their young. Singing-birds frequent in greatest numbers our half-cultivated lands and the woods adjoining them. It may therefore be inferred that as the country grows older and is more extensively cleared and cultivated, the numbers of our songsters will increase, and it is not improbable that their vocal powers may improve. It may be true that for many years after the first settlement of this country there were but few singing-birds and that they have multiplied with the cultivation of the soil. At that time, though the same species existed here and were musical, their numbers were so small that they were not universally heard. Hence early travellers were led to believe that American birds were generally silent.

By a little observation we should soon be convinced that the primitive forest contains but few songsters. There you find crows, jays, woodpeckers, and other noisy birds in great numbers; and you occasionally hear the notes of the sylvias and solitary thrushes. But not until you are in the vicinity of farms and other cultivated lands are your ears saluted by a full band of feathered musicians. The bobolinks are not seen in a forest, and are unfrequent in the wild pastures or meadows which were their primitive resorts. At the present day they have left their early habitats, and seek the cultivated grass-lands, that afford them a more abundant supply of insect-food, with which they feed their young. They build upon the ground in the grass, and their nests are exposed in great numbers by the scythe of the mower, if he begins haymaking early in the season.

These birds, as well as robins, before America was settled by the Europeans, and when the greater part of the country was a wilderness, must have been comparatively few. Though the bobolink consumes great quantities of rice after the young are fledged and the whole family have departed, it is not the rice-fields which have made its species more numerous, but the increased abundance of insect food in the North, where they breed, — an increase consequent upon the increased amount of tillage. The robins are dependent entirely upon insect food, and must have multiplied in greater proportion than the bobolinks. There are probably thousands of both species at the present day to as many hundreds that existed at the discovery of America. Many other small birds, such as the song-sparrow and the linnet, have increased nearly in the same ratio with the progress of agriculture and the settlement of the country.

Domestication blunts the original instincts of animals and renders birds partially indifferent to colors. It changes their plumage as well as their instincts. In proportion to the length of time any species has been domesticated, it is unsafe to depend on the correctness of our observation of their instincts with respect to colors. All the gallinaceous birds, except the common hen, lay speckled eggs. It is probable that during the thousands of ages since the latter was domesticated her eggs have lost their original marking and have become white. As great a change has happened in their plumage, while the more recently domesticated birds, like the turkey and guinea-hen, retain more nearly their original markings. After domestication birds no longer require to be protected from the sight of their enemies by the hues of their plumage. Their natural predisposition to be marked only by a certain combination of hues is weakened. Being entirely in the power and under the protection of man, color is of no service to them, as in their natural and wild state.

Mr. S. P. Fowler communicated to the Essex Institute an essay containing some important facts concerning the changes in the habits of some of our own birds. He says: "The Baltimore oriole still constructs her nest after the old pattern, but has learned to weave it with materials furnished by civilization. I have a whole nest of this kind, made wholly from materials swept out of a milliner's shop, woven and interlaced with ribbons and laces, including a threaded needle." He has noticed for several years a change in the habits of our crow-blackbirds, and thinks they are becoming domesticated, like the rooks of England. This change, in his opinion, has been produced by planting the white pine in cultivated grounds; for wherever a group of pines has attained the height of thirty feet, they are visited by these birds for breeding, even in proximity to our populous villages. He states that the purple finches have followed the evergreen trees that have been planted in our enclosures, though a few years since they were to be seen chiefly in our cedar groves. They have grown more numerous, and breed in his grounds on the branches of the spruce, feeding early in the season upon the flower-buds of the elm or upon those of the pear-tree.



MARTIN

NOVEMBER.

A CHANGE has lately come over the face of nature; the bright garniture of field and wood has faded; the leaves have fallen to the ground, and the sun gleams brightly through the naked branches of the trees into the late dark recesses of the forest. In some years the bright hues of autumn remain unseared by frost until November has tarried with us many days. It is then melancholy to observe the change that suddenly takes place in the aspect of the woods after the first wintry night. The longer this fatal blast is deferred, the more sudden and manifest are its effects. The fields to-day may be glowing in the fairest hues of autumnal splendor. One night passes away, — a night of still, freezing cold, depositing a beautiful frostwork on our windows, — and lo! a complete robe of monotonous brown covers the wide forest and all its colors have vanished. After this frost the leaves fall rapidly from the trees, and the first vigorous wind will nearly disrobe them of their foliage.

This change is usually more gradual. Slight frosts occur one after another during many successive nights, each adding a browner tint to the foliage and causing the different trees to shed their leaves in natural succession. Though November is the time of the general fall of the leaf, yet many trees cast off their vesture in October. But the flowering season closed with the last of the month. A few asters are still seen in the woods, and here and there on the green southern slopes a violet will look up with its mild blue eye, like a star of promise, to remind us of the beauties of the coming spring. There is a melancholy pleasure attending a ramble at this time, while taking note of the changes of the year, and of the care with which Nature provides for the preservation of her charge during the coming season of cold. All sounds that meet the ear are in harmony with our feelings. The breezes murmur with a plaintive moan, while shaking the dropping leaves from the trees, as if they felt a sympathy with the general decay, and carefully strew them over the beds of the flowers to afford them a warm covering and protection from the ungenial winter. The sear and yellow leaves eddying with the fitful breezes fill up the hollows in the pastures where slumbering lilies and violets repose, and gather around the borders of the woods, where the vernal flowers are sleeping and require their warmth and protection. There is an influence breathing from all nature in the autumn that leads us to meditate on the charms of the seasons that have flown, and prepares us by the regrets thus awakened to realize their full worth, and to experience the greater delight when we meet them once more.

There are rural sounds as well as rural sights which are characteristic of this as well as every other month of the year, all associated with the beauties and bounties of their respective seasons. The chirping of insects declines during October and dies away to silence before the middle of the present month; and then do the voices of the winter birds become more audible. Their harsh unmusical voices harmonize not unpleasantly with the murmuring of wintry winds and with the desolate appearance of nature. The water birds assemble in the harbors and are unusually loquacious; and occasionally on still evenings we hear the cackling flight of geese as they are proceeding aloft to the places of their hyemal abode. These different sounds, though unmusical and melancholy, awaken many pleasant recollections of the season, and always attract our attention.

But silence for the most part prevails in the fields and woods so lately vocal with cheerful notes. The birds that long since discontinued their songs have forsaken our territories, and but few are either heard or seen. The grasshoppers have hung their harps upon the brown sedges and are buried in a torpid sleep. The butterflies also have perished with the flowers, and the whole tribe of sportive insects that enlivened the prospect with their motions have gone from our sight. Few sounds are heard on still days, save the dropping of nuts, the rustling of leaves, and the careering of the fitful winds that often disturb the general calm. Beautiful sights and sounds have vanished together, and the rambler who goes out to greet the cheerful objects of nature finds himself alone, communing only with silence and solitude.

It is in these days of November that we most fully realize how much of the pleasure of a rural excursion is derived from the melodies that greet our ears during the vocal months of the year. Since the merry-making tenants of the groves have left them to inanimate sounds Nature seems divested of life and personality. While separated from all sounds of rejoicing and animation, we seem to be in the presence of friends who are silent and mourning over some bereavement. In the vocal season the merry voices of birds and insects give life to the inanimate objects around us, and Nature herself seems to be talking with us in our solitary but not lonely walk. But when these gay and social creatures are absent, the places they frequented are converted into solitude. No cheerful voices are speaking to us, no bright flowers are smiling upon us, and we feel like one who is left alone to mourn over the scenes of absent joys and departed friends.

But the silence to which I allude is chiefly that of the singing-birds, whose voices are the natural language of love and rejoicing. There are still many sounds which are characteristic of the month. Hollow winds are sighing through the half-leafless wood, and the sharp rustling of dry oak-leaves is heard aloft in the place of the warbling of birds and the soft whispering of zephyrs. The winds as they sweep over the shrubbery produce a shrill sound that chills us as the bleak foreboding of winter. The passing breezes have lost that mellowness of tone that comes from them in summer while floating over the tender herbs and the flexible grain. Every sound they make is sharper whether they are rustling among the dry cornfields or whistling among the naked branches of the trees. Since the forests have shed their leaves the voices of the winter birds are heard with more distinctness, and the echoes are repeated with a greater number of reverberations among the rocks and hills.

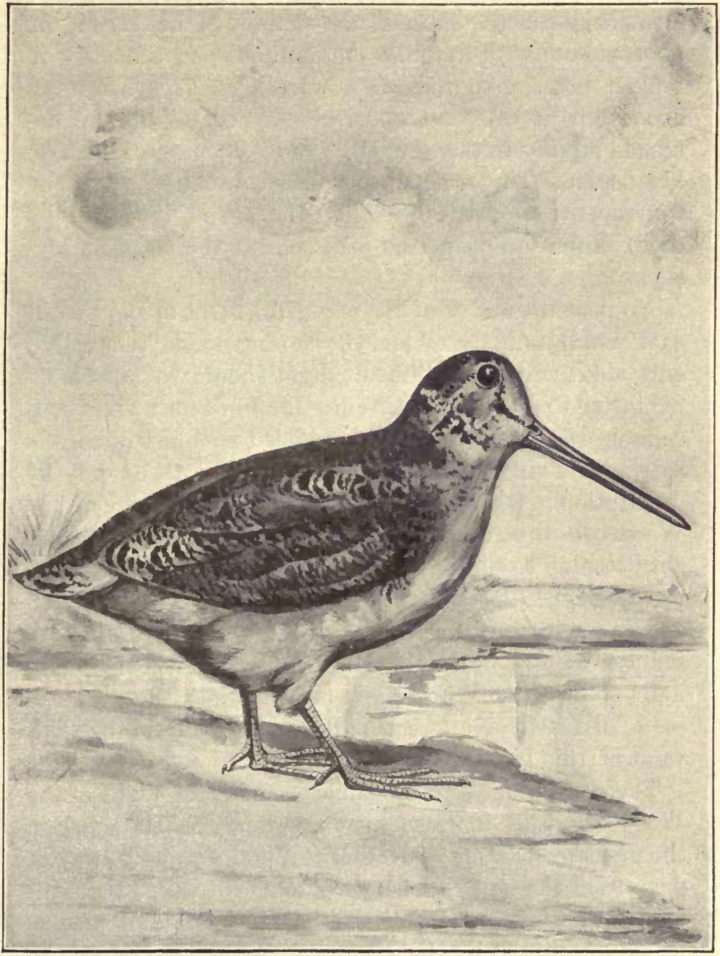
Our rural festivities are past, the harvest is gathered, and all hands are busy preparing for the comforts of the winter fireside. The days are short, and the sun at noonday looks down with a slanting beam and diminished fervor, or remains behind the cloud that often overshadows the horizon. Dark clouds of ominous forms and threatening look brood sometimes for whole days over the sullen atmosphere, through which the beams of the sun will occasionally peer, as if to bid us not wholly despair of his benignant presence. Every object in the rural world tells of the coming of snows and of the rapid passing of the genial days of autumn. The evergreens are the only lively objects that grace the landscape, and the flowers lie buried under the faded leaves of the trees that lift up their branches as if in supplication to the skies.

BIRDS OF THE MOOR.

THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK.

THE American Woodcock is a more interesting bird than we should suppose from his general appearance and physiognomy. He is mainly nocturnal in his habits, and his ways are very singular and worthy of study. He obtains his food by scratching up the leaves and rubbish that lie upon the surface of the ground in damp and wooded places, and by boring into the earth for worms. He remains concealed in the wood during the day, and comes out to feed at twilight, choosing the open ploughed land where worms are abundant. Yet it is probable that in the shade of the wood he is more or less busy among the leaves in the daytime.

The Woodcock does not usually venture abroad in the open day, unless he be disturbed and driven from his retreat. He makes his first appearance here early in April, and at this time we may observe that soaring habit which renders him one of the picturesque objects of nature. This soaring takes place soon after sunset, continues during twilight, and is repeated at a corresponding hour in the morning. If you listen at these times near the place of his resort, he will soon reveal himself by a lively peep, frequently uttered from the ground. While repeating this note he may be seen strutting about like a Turkey-cock, with fantastic jerkings of the tail and a frequent turning of the head ; and his mate is, I believe, at this time not far off. Suddenly he springs upward, and with a wide circular sweep, uttering at the same time



WOODCOCK

a rapid whistling note, he rises in a spiral course to a great height in the air. At the summit of his ascent, he hovers about with irregular motions, chirping a medley of broken notes, like imperfect warbling. This continues about ten or fifteen seconds, when it ceases and he descends rapidly to the ground. We seldom hear him in his descent, but receive the first intimation of it by the repetition of his *peep,* like the sound produced by those minute wooden trumpets sold at the German toyshops.

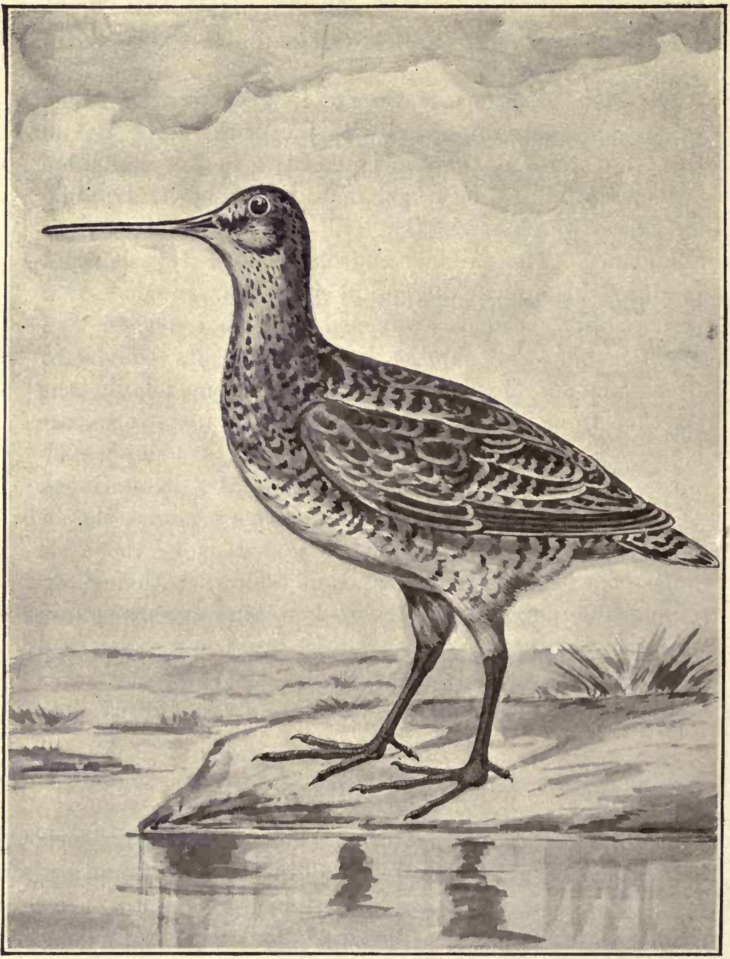
No person could watch this playful flight of the Woodcock without interest; and it is remarkable that a bird with short wings and difficult flight should be capable of mounting to so great an altitude. It affords me a vivid conception of the pleasure with which I should witness the soaring and singing of the Skylark, known to us only by description. I have but to imagine the chirruping of the Woodcock to be a melodious series of notes to feel that I am listening to the bird which has been so familiarized to us by English poetry, that in our early days we often watch for his greeting on a summer sunrise. It is with sadness we first learn that the Skylark is not an inhabitant of the New World; and our mornings and evenings seem divested of a great part of their charm by their want of this lyric accompaniment.

There are other sounds connected with the flight of the Woodcock that increase his importance as an actor in the great melodrama of Nature. When we stroll away at dusk from the noise of the town, to a spot where the stillness permits us to hear distinctly all those faint sounds which are turned by the silence of night into music, we may hear at frequent intervals the hum produced by the irregular flight of the Woodcock as he passes over short distances near the wood. It is like the sound of the wings of Doves, or like that produced by the rapid whisking of a slender rod through the air. There is a plaintive feeling of mystery attached to these musical flights that yields a savor of romance to the quiet voluptuousness of a summer evening.

On such occasions, if we are in a moralizing mood, we are agreeably impressed with the truth of the maxim that the secret of happiness consists in keeping alive our susceptibilities by frugal indulgence, and by avoiding an excess of pleasures that pall in proportion to their abundance. The stillness and darkness of a quiet night produce this quickening effect upon our minds. Our susceptibility is then awakened to such a degree that slight sounds and faintly discernible lights convey to us an amount of pleasure that is seldom felt in the daytime from influences even of a more inspiring character. Thus the player in an orchestra can enjoy such music only as would deafen common ears by its crash of sounds in which they can perceive no connection or harmony; while the simple rustic listens to the rude notes of a flageolet in the hands of a clown with feelings of ineffable delight. To the seekers after luxurious and exciting pleasures, Nature, if they could but understand her language, would say, "Except ye become as this simple rustic, ye cannot enter into my paradise."

THE SNIPE.

The Snipe has the nocturnal habits of the Woodcock, and is common in New England in the spring and autumn, but does not often breed here. It has the same habits of feeding as the Woodcock, and the same way of soaring into the air during morning and evening twilight, when he performs a sort of musical medley, which Audubon has described in the following passage: "The birds are met with in the meadows and low grounds, and by



SNIPE

being on the spot before sunrise, you may see both male and female mount high in a spiral manner, now with continuous beats of the wings, now in short sailings, until more than a hundred yards high, when they whirl round each other with extreme velocity, and dance as it were to their own music; for at this juncture, and during the space of four or five minutes, you hear rolling notes mingled together, each more or less distinct, perhaps, according to the state of the atmosphere. The sounds produced are extremely pleasing, though they fall faintly on the ear. I know not how to describe them; but I am well assured that they are not produced simply by the beatings of their wings, as at this time the wings are not flapped, but are used in sailing swiftly in a circle, not many feet in diameter. A person might cause a sound somewhat similar, by blowing rapidly and alternately from one end to another across a set of small pipes consisting of two or three modulations. This performance is kept up till incubation terminates; but I have never observed it at any other period." In this respect the Snipe differs from the Woodcock, whose nocturnal flights I have not witnessed except in April and perhaps the early part of May. The time occupied by the Woodcock in the air is never more, I am confident, than fifteen seconds, and the notes uttered by him while poised at the summit of his ascent sound exactly like *chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, chip*, about as rapidly as we might utter them in a loud whisper.

THE VIRGINIA RAIL.

The shyness and timidity of the Virginia Rail, and the quickness of its movements, its peculiar graceful attitudes, and the rare occasions on which we can obtain sight of one, combine to render this bird highly interesting. It is so seldom seen on account of its habit of concealment during the day and of feeding at evening and morning twilight, that many persons have never met with it. It is in fact quite a common bird, and breeds in the thickets in the immediate vicinity of our rivers and ponds. I have seen numbers of this species in the meadows surrounding Fresh Pond in Cambridge when hunting for aquatic plants and flowers; but I have not discovered their nests. Samuels says the eggs, which are from six to ten in number, are of a deep buff color, and that their nest "is nothing but a pile of weeds or grass which it arranges in a compact manner, and hollows to the depth perhaps of an inch or an inch and a half."

This is a very pretty species. The upper parts are brown, striped with deeper shades of the same color; the feathers on the breast are of a bright brown deepening into red; the wings black and chestnut with some white lines. It resembles somewhat a miniature hen with long legs and short tail, and is very nimble in its movements. This species is most commonly found in those fresh meadows into which the salt water extends or those salt marshes which are pervaded by a stream of fresh water. They feed more on worms and insects than upon seeds and grain, though they do not refuse a granivorous diet.

THE CLAPPER RAIL.

I have so seldom seen the Clapper Rail, though I have many times heard its clattering notes, that I have nothing to say of it from my own observation. But as it is not unfrequent on the New England coast, it seems a fit subject to be introduced in my descriptions of picturesque birds. I shall, therefore, in this case deviate from my general practice of writing from my own experience, and insert in this place a brief abstract of an essay on

"The Clapper Rail," by Dr. E. Coues, published in the "American Naturalist," Vol. III. pp. 600 – 607.

The Clapper Rail, or Salt-water Marsh Hen, inhabits the marshes all along our coast, within reach of the tides, rarely, if ever, straying inward. It goes as far as Massachusetts, where it is rare; but is found abundantly in the Middle States, and in countless numbers on the coast of North Carolina, where it spends the whole year. The young birds while in their downy plumage are jet black, with a faint gloss of green, resembling newly hatched chickens. Rails live in the marshes, and are not very often seen except when they fly up.

The eggs of the Clapper Rail are of a pale buff or cream color. They are dotted or splashed with irregular spots of a dull purple or lilac color; and the number found in a nest is from six to nine. They raise two broods in a season, and some idea of the countless numbers of Rails in the marshes may be gained from the fact that baskets full of eggs are gathered by boys and brought to the Beaufort market.

The Rails' nests are sometimes floated away and destroyed by an unusual rise of the tide caused by a storm. A great tragedy of this kind happened at Fort Macon on the 22d of May, 1869, when the marsh, usually above water, was flooded, — only here and there a little knoll breaking the monotony of the water. There was a terrible commotion among the Rails at first, and the reeds resounded with their hoarse cries of terror. But as the waters advanced and inundated their houses the birds became silent again, as if in unspeakable misery. They wandered in listless dejection over beds of floating wrack, swam aimlessly over the water, or gathered stupefied in groups upon projecting knolls. Few of the old birds probably were drowned, but most of the young must have perished.

As if to guard against such an accident, the Rails generally build their nests around the margins of the marsh or in elevated spots, at about the usual high-water mark. The nest is always placed on the ground, in a bunch of reeds or tussock of grass or clump of little bushes. It is a flimsy structure made of dry grasses or reed-stalks broken in pieces and matted together, but not intertwined. Sometimes it is barely thick enough to keep the eggs from the wet.

The Rail, though not formed like a natatorial bird, swims very well for short distances. Dr. Coues has often seen it take to the water from choice, without necessity, and noticed that it swam buoyantly and with ease, like a coot. But the bird is a poor flyer, and it is surprising, therefore, that some of the family perform such extensive migrations. The Rails, in fact, are not distinguished either as flyers or swimmers. But as walkers they are unsurpassed; and have the power of making a remarkable compression of their body, that enables them to pass through close-set reeds. The bird indeed, when rapidly and slyly stealing through the brush, becomes literally as "thin as a rail."

Rails are among the most harmless and inoffensive of birds. But when wounded or caught, they make the best fight they can and show good spirit. In this case they use their sharp claws for a weapon rather than their slender bill. A colony of Rails goes far towards relieving a marsh of its monotony. Retiring and unfamiliar as they are, and seldom seen, considering their immense numbers, they have at times a very effective way of asserting themselves. Silent during a great part of the year, or at most only indulging in a spasmodic croak now and then, during the breeding-season they are perhaps the noisiest birds in the country. Let a gun be fired in the marsh, and like the reverberating echoes of the report a hundred cries come instantly from as many startled throats. The noise spreads on all sides, like ripples on the water at the plash of a stone, till it dies away in the distance. In the evening and morning particularly, the Rails seem perfectly reckless, and their jovial if unmusical notes resound till the very reeds seem to quake. Dr. Coues compares them to the French *claqueurs.* Unobtrusive, unrecognized except by a few, almost unknown to the uninitiated, the birds steadily and faithfully fulfil their allotted parts; like *claqueurs* they fill the pit, ready at a sign to applaud anything that may be going on in the drama of life before them.

THE HERON.

No family of birds is possessed of more of those qualities which are especially regarded as picturesque than the Herons. This family comprehends a great many species, distinguished by their remarkable appearance both when flying aloft and when wading in their native swamps. They are generally seen in flocks, passing the day in sluggish inactivity, but called forth to action by hunger in the evening when they take their food. It is at the hour just after twilight that their peculiar cries are heard far aloft as they pass from their secluded day-haunts to their nocturnal feeding-places. Their flight deserves attention from their slow and solemn motion on the wing. Their flying attitude, however, is uncouth, with the neck bent backwards, their head resting against their shoulders, and their long legs stretched out behind them in the most awkward manner.

THE BITTERN.

Among the Heron family we discover a few birds which, though not very well known, have ways that are singular and interesting. Goldsmith considered one of these worthy of introduction into his "Deserted Village" as contributing to the poetic sentiment of desolation. Thus, in his description of the grounds which were the ancient site of the village, we read:—

> "Along its glades, a solitary guest,
> The hollow-sounding Bittern guards its nest."

The American Bittern is a smaller bird than the one to which the poet alludes, but is probably a variety of the European species. It displays the same nocturnal habits, and has received at the South the name of *Dunkadoo,* from the resemblance of its common note to those syllables. This is a hollow-sounding noise, which would attract the attention of every listener. I have heard it by day in wooded swamps near ponds, and am at a loss to explain how so small a bird can produce so low and hollow a note. The common people of England have a notion that it thrusts its head into a hollow reed and uses it as a speaking-trumpet, and at times puts its head into the water and bubbles its notes in imitation of a bullfrog. The American Bittern utters another note resembling the sound produced by hammering upon a stake when driving it into the ground. Hence the name of *Stake-driver* applied to him in some parts of New England.

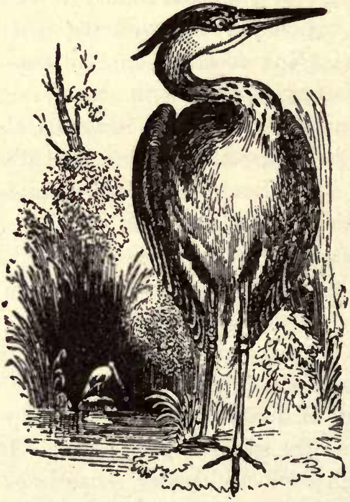
THE QUA BIRD.

On a still evening in summer no sound is more common above our heads than the singular voice of the Qua Bird, as he passes in slow and solemn flight from his retreats where he passes the day to his feeding-places upon the sea-shore. His note is like the syllable *quaw* suddenly pronounced. If it were prolonged it might resemble the cawing of a Crow. This note is very frequently repeated, though one note by the same bird is never immediately succeeded by another. The birds of this species are social in their habits, and the woods in which they assemble are called heronries. During the breeding-season they are extremely noisy, uttering the most uncouth and unmusical sounds that can be imagined.

THE CRANE, OR BLUE HERON.

The Crane is a very attractive bird; but the only individuals of the species I have seen enough to study their ways and manners were tamed. There is a sort of majesty in their appearance which I could not but admire. "During the day," says Samuels, "the Crane seems to prefer the solitudes of the forest for its retreat, as it is usually seen in the meadows only at early morning and in the latter part of the afternoon. It then, by the side of a ditch or a pond, is observed patiently watching for its prey. It remains standing motionless, until a fish or a frog presents itself, when with an unerring stroke with its beak, as quick as lightning it seizes, beats to pieces, and swallows it. This act is often repeated; and as the Heron varies this diet with meadow-mice, snakes, and insects, it certainly does not lead the life of misery and want that many writers ascribe to it."

This bird, like the Night Heron, breeds in communities. Samuels once visited with some attendants a heronry of this species in a deep swamp, intersected by a branch of the Androscoggin River. The swamp over which he had to pass was full of quagmires; and these he could hardly distinguish from the green turfy ground. It was only by wading through mud and water, sometimes nearly up to his waist, or by leaping from one fallen tree to another, through briers and brushwood, that he arrived beneath the trees which the birds occupied. These were dead hemlocks, without branches less than thirty feet from the ground, and could not be climbed. The nests, placed in the summits of the trees, were nearly flat, constructed of twigs and put together very loosely. It was on the 25th of June, and the young were about two thirds grown. He says the old birds flew over their heads uttering their hoarse, *husky*, and guttural cries. He observed, however, that they were careful to keep out of gunshot. The eggs, he says, are of a bluish-green color, and but one brood is reared in the season. The birds are very suspicious; they are constantly looking out for danger, and with their keen eyes, long neck, and fine sense of hearing, they immediately detect the approach of a gunner.



HERON.

TESTIMONY FOR THE BIRDS.

A FARMER'S boy in Ohio, observing a small flock of quails in his father's cornfield, resolved to watch their motions. They pursued a regular course in their foraging, beginning on one side of the field, taking about five rows and following them uniformly to the opposite end. Returning in the same manner over the next five rows, they continued this course until they had explored the greater part of the field. The lad, suspecting them of pulling up the corn, shot one of them and examined the ground. In the whole space over which they had travelled he found but one stalk of corn disturbed. This was nearly scratched out of the ground, but the kernel still adhered to it. In the craw of the quail he found one cutworm, twenty-one striped vine-bugs, and one hundred chinch-bugs, but not a single kernel of corn. As the quail is a granivorous bird in winter, this fact proves that even those birds that are able to subsist upon seeds prefer insects and grubs when they have their choice.

Mr. Roberts, a farmer who resided in Colesville, Ohio, was invited by a neighbor to assist him in killing some yellow-birds which, as he thought, were destroying his wheat. Mr. Roberts, not believing the birds guilty of any such mischief, was inclined to protect them. To satisfy his curiosity, however, he killed one of the yellow-birds, and found, upon opening its crop, that instead of wheat the bird had devoured the weevil, the greatest destroyer of wheat. He found in the bird's crop as many as two hundred weevils and but four grains of wheat;

and as each of those grains contained a weevil, he believed they were eaten for the sake of the insect within them. The jealousy of the Ohio farmers had prompted them in this case to destroy a family of birds, at the very time when they were performing an incalculable amount of benefit to agriculture.

The Southern farmers suspected the kildeer, a species of plover, of destroying young turnips. A writer in the "Southern Planter," alluding to this notion, declares the kildeer to be the true guardian of the turnip crop; and to prove his assertion he dissected a number of them. Their crops were found to contain no vegetable substance. Nothing was found in them save the little bug that is a well-known destroyer of turnips and tobacco-plants. They were little hopping beetles, and were rapidly increasing, because the kildeers, their natural enemies, had been nearly exterminated. "I seldom nowadays," he says, "hear the kildeer's voice. Let no man henceforth kill one except to convince himself and others that they eat no young turnips. The sacrifice of one, producing such conviction, may save hundreds of his brethren."

Insects of various kinds, in the year 1826, had become so generally destructive as to cause apprehensions for the safety of all products of the field. A correspondent of the "Massachusetts Yeoman" expressed his belief that this unusual number of injurious insects was caused by the scarcity of birds. His neighbors were astonished that everything in his garden should be so thrifty, while their plants were cut down and destroyed before they had acquired any important growth. "I have no concern about it," he replied; "my robins see to that. I preserve them from their enemies, and they preserve my garden from worms and insects. In one corner of my garden near my dwelling is a tree in which a couple of these friends of man have reared their families for three successive years. There has ever been a harmony between my birds and me." He protected all the birds that frequented his grounds, and they devoured the insects that infested them. Grasshoppers, he said, in the early stage of their existence are not bigger than flies. Ten or twelve birds would clear a whole field of them before they could do any injury to the grass-crop.

Small owls are useful as destroyers of the larger moths and nocturnal insects, and they are excellent mousers. Hon. Richard Peters, in "The Memoirs of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture," says that all owls are destroyers of mice. A pine-tree near his house afforded a resort to about a dozen of these birds during the winter. From witnessing their operations, he concluded that a few of them, if harbored near, would clear the fields, barns, and out-houses of vermin. He says it is only the larger species that will attack poultry or do any other damage.

The inhabitants of a new country, like America, are not so well informed of the evils that follow the destruction of birds as those of old countries, who have learned from the experience of many generations the indispensable character of their services. Vincent Kollar says, if we would prevent the increase of the cockchafer, we must spare the birds that feed upon its larva. Among these he thinks the crow deserves the first place. The bird follows the plough to obtain the larva of this and other insects as they are turned out by the furrows. In gardens he walks among the plants, and wherever one has begun to wither he plunges his bill into the ground and draws out the grub. Crows do the same in the meadows, which are sometimes nearly covered with them. The American crow has the same habits; but he does not follow the plough, from his fear of the farmer's gun. Our people will not believe that the crow does anything but mischief. But John Randolph was so well convinced of the usefulness of crows, that he would not allow one to be shot upon his farm. To prevent their depredations he fed them liberally when his young corn was liable to be injured by them.

Mr. E. S. Samuels, while admitting the important services rendered by the crow as a destroyer of insects, larva, and vermin, thinks it counterbalances all its services by its habit of devouring young birds while in their nest, of which it destroys an immense number. His reasoning is logical, and I have no information that would lead me to doubt his facts. It seems probable, however, that the crow would find its time more profitably spent in exploring the fields for grubs and worms than in hunting for birds'-nests.

Nuttall, after describing the mischief done to the corn-crop by immense assemblages of crow-blackbirds in the Southern States and the hatred borne them by the farmers on that account, remarks that on their arrival their food for a long time consists wholly of those insects which are the greatest pests to the farmer. He says they familiarly follow the plough, and take all the grubs and other noxious vermin as they appear, scratching the loose soil, that none may escape. He affirms that up to the time of the harvest he has found invariably, upon dissection, that their food consists of larva, caterpillars, moths, and beetles, in such immense quantities that if they had lived they would have destroyed the whole crop.

DECEMBER.

It is one of the most cheerful recreations for a leisure hour, to go out into the fields, under a mild, open sky, to study the various appearances of Nature that accompany the changes of the seasons, and to note those phenomena which are peculiar to a climate of frost and snow. The inhabitant of the tropics with his perpetual summer, who sees no periodical changes except the alternations of rain and drought, is deprived of a happy advantage possessed by the inhabitant of the north; and, with all the blessings of his voluptuous climate, is visited by a smaller portion of the moral enjoyments of life. In the minds of those who dwell in a northern latitude there are sentiments which are probably never felt by the indolent dweller in the land of the date and the palm; and however poetical to us may seem the imagery drawn from the pictures we have read of those blissful regions, ours is most truly the region of poetry, and of all those sentiments which poetry aims to express.

It will not be denied that in winter Nature has comparatively but few attractions; that the woods and fields offer but few temptations to ramble; and that these are such as appeal to the imagination rather than to the senses, by furnishing matter for studious reflection and calling up pleasing and poetic images. The man of phlegmatic mind sees, in all these phenomena, nothing but dreariness and desolation; while to the studious or the imaginative, every form of vegetation on the surface of the earth becomes an instructive lesson or awakens a train of imagery that inspires him, on a winter's walk, with a buoyancy not often felt in the balmy days of June. Then does he trace, with unalloyed delight, every green leaf that seems budding out for spring; and in the general stillness, every sound from abroad has a gladness in its tone not surpassed by the melodies of a summer morning.

On these pleasant days of winter, which are of frequent occurrence in our variable climate, I often indulge myself in a solitary ramble, taking note of those forms of vegetation that remain unchanged, and of the still greater number that lie folded in hyemal sleep. For such excursions the only proper time is when the earth is free from snow, which, though a beautifier of the prospect, conceals all minute objects that are strewed upon the ground or that are still feebly vegetating under the protection of the woods. The most prominent appearances are the remains of autumnal vegetation. The stalks of the faded asters are still erect, with their downy heads shaking in the breeze, which has already scattered their seeds upon the ground; and the more conspicuous tufts of the golden-rods are seen in nodding and irregular rows under the fences, or bending over the ice that covers the meadows where they grew. All these are but the faded garlands of Nature, that pleasantly remind us of the past festivities of summer, of cheerful toil, or studious recreation.

Nature never entirely conceals the beauties of the field and wood save when, for their protection, she covers them with snow. The faded remnants of last summer's vegetation may have but little positive beauty; but to the mind of the naturalist they are attractive on account of the lessons they afford and the sentiments they awaken. But there are objects in the wood which are neither faded nor leafless; and many that are leafless still retain their beauty and the appearance of life. Beside the evergreens, many of the herbs that bear the early spring flowers still retain their freshness and spread out their green leaves in the protected nook or in the recesses of the fern-covered rocks. The leaves of the wild strawberry and the cinquefoil are always green in the meadows, and those of the violet on the sheltered slope of the hill. The crowfoot and the geranium are in many places as fresh as in May; and the aquatic ranunculus and the wild cresses are brightly glowing with their emerald foliage, in the depths of the crystal watercourses that remain unfrozen beneath the wooded precipice, or in the mossy ravines of the forest.

These phenomena are doubly interesting as evidences of the continued life of the beautiful things they represent, and of the invisible and ever-watchful providence of Nature. Every step we take brings under our review other similar curiosities of vegetable life, which, by reason of their commonness, often escape our observation. On the sandy plain the slender hazel-bushes are loaded with thousands of purple aments, suspended from their flexile twigs, all ready to burst into bloom at the very first breath of spring. In the wet lands, where the surface is one continued sheet of ice, the crowded alders are so full of their embryo blossoms, that their branches seem to be hung with dark purple fruit; and the sweet-fern of the upland pastures, in still, mild weather, often faintly perfumes the atmosphere with the scent of its half-developed leaves and flowers.

But the face of Nature, at this time, is not an unfruitful subject for the poet or the painter. The evergreens, if not more beautiful, are more conspicuous than at any other season; and there are many bountiful streamlets that ripple through the woods and often in their depths find protection from the greatest cold. Around these streams the embroidering mosses are as green as the grasses in May. The water-cresses may be seen growing freshly at the bottom of their channels, and the ferns are beautiful among the shelving rocks, through which the waters make their gurgling tour. When the sun, at noonday, penetrates into these green and sheltered recesses, before the snow has come upon the earth, when the pines are waving overhead, the laurels clustering with the undergrowth, and the dewberry (evergreen-blackberry) trailing at our feet, we can easily imagine ourselves surrounded by the green luxuriance of summer. Nature seems to have prepared these pleasant evergreen retreats, that they might afford to her pious votaries a shelter during their winter walks, and a prospect to gladden their eyes, when they go out to admire her works, and pay the homage of a humble heart to the great Architect of the universe.

Nor is the season without its harvest. The bayberry, or false myrtle, in dry places gleams with dense clusters of greenish-white berries, that almost conceal the branches by their profusion; the pale azure berries of the juniper are sparkling brightly in the midst of their sombre evergreen foliage; and the prinos or black-alder bushes, glowing with the brightest scarlet fruit, and resembling at a distance pyramids of flame, are irregularly distributed over the wooded swamps. While the barberries hang in wilted and blackened clusters from their bushes in the uplands, the cranberries in the peat-meadows shine out like glistening rubies, from their masses of delicate and tangled vinery. In the open places of the woods the earth is mantled with the dark glossy green leaves of the gaultheria, half concealing its drooping crimson berries; and the mitchella, of a more curious habit, each berry being formed by the united germs of two flowers, (twins upon the same stem,) adorns similar places with fairer foliage and brighter fruit.

There is a sort of perpetual spring in these protected arbors and recesses, where we may at all times behold the springing herbs and sprouting shrubbery, when they are not hidden under the snow-drift. The American hare feeds upon the foliage of these tender herbs, when she exposes herself at this season to the aim of the gunner. She cannot so well provide for her winter wants as the squirrel, whose food, contained in a husk or a nutshell, may be abundantly hoarded in her subterranean granaries. The hare in her garment of fur, protected from the cold, feels no dread of the climate; and man is almost the only enemy who threatens her, when she comes out timidly to browse upon the scant leaves of the white clover, or the heath-like foliage of the hypericum.

But the charm of a winter's walk is derived chiefly from the flowerless plants, — the ferns and lichens of the rocks, the mosses of the dells and meres, and the trailing wintergreens of the pastoral hills. Many species of these plants seem to revel in cold weather, as if it were congenial to their health and wants. To them has Nature intrusted the care of dressing all her barren places in verdure, and of preserving a grateful remnant of summer beauty in the dreary places of winter's abode. And it is not to be wondered that, to the fanciful minds of every nation, the woods have always seemed to be peopled with fairy spirits, by whose unseen hands the earth is garlanded with lovely wreaths of verdure at a time when not a flower is to be found upon the hills or in the meadow.

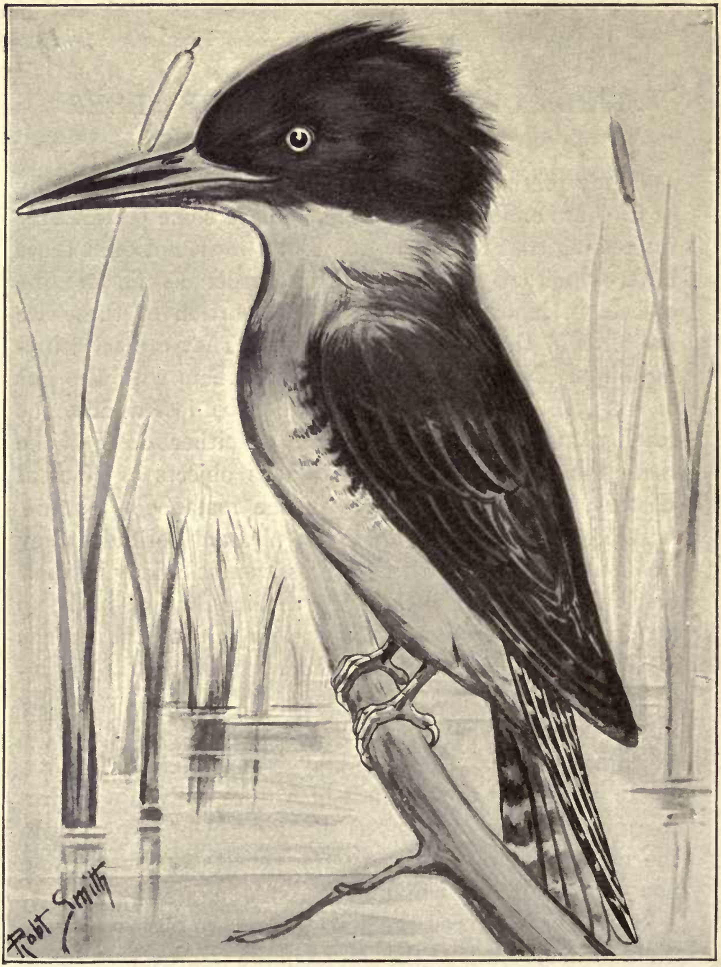
Whether we are adapted to nature, or nature to us, it is not to be denied that on the face of the earth those objects that appear to be natural are more congenial to our feelings than others strictly artificial. The lichen-covered rocks, that form so remarkable a feature of the hills surrounding our coast, are far more pleasing to every man's sight than similar rocks without this garniture. All this may be partly attributed to the different associations connected with the two, in our habitual trains of thought; the one presenting to us the evidence of antiquity, the other only the disagreeable idea of that defacement so generally attendant on the progress of pioneer settlements. Hence the lichens and mosses, upon the surface of the rocks, have an expression which has always been eagerly copied by the painter, and is associated with many romantic images, like the clambering ivy upon the walls of an ancient ruined tower.

At this season, when the greater part of the landscape is either covered with snow, or with the seared and brown herbage of winter, this vegetation of the rocks has a singular interest. In summer the rocks are bald in their appearance, while all around them is fresh and lively. In winter, on the other hand, they are covered with a pale verdure, interspersed with many brilliant colors, while the surrounding surface is a comparative blank. Some objects are intrinsically beautiful, others are beautiful by suggestion, others again by contrast. This latter principle causes many things to appear delightful to the eye at one period, which at other times would, by comparison with brighter objects, seem dull and lifeless. Hence on a winter's ramble, when there is no snow upon the ground, our attention is fixed, not only upon the lichens and evergreens, but likewise on the bright purple glow that proceeds from every plat of living shrubbery which is spread out in the wild. This appearance is beautiful by contrast with the dull sombre hues of the surrounding faded herbage, and it is likewise strongly suggestive of the life and vigor of Nature.

BIRDS OF THE SEA AND THE SHORE.

In my preceding essays I have treated of birds chiefly as they are endowed with song, or have some particularly interesting trait of character. But I must not omit those birds which may be especially regarded as picturesque objects in landscape. A large proportion of these are the birds of the sea and the shore. They are not singing-birds. Nature has not provided them with the gift of song, the music of which would be lost amidst the roaring and dashing of waves. Neither do I make them the subject of my remarks as objects of Natural History, but rather as actors in the romance of Nature. I treat of them as they affect the pleasant solitudes they frequent, and increase their impressiveness chiefly by their graceful or singular flight. To the motions of birds, no less than to their beauty of plumage and to the sounds of their voices, are we indebted for a great part of the interest we feel in our native land. The more we study them, the more shall we feel that in whatever direction we turn our observations, we may extend them to infinity. There is no limit to the study of Nature. Even a subject so apparently insignificant as the flight of birds may open the eyes to new beauties in the aspects of Nature and new sources of rational delight.

Nothing can exceed the gracefulness we observe in the flight of many birds of the sea, from the Osprey, that vaults in the upper region of the clouds, down to the little Sandpiper, that charms the youthful sportsman by its merry movements and circuitous flights. These little birds



KINGFISHER

belong to the tribe of Waders, which are more graceful in their walk than any that live in trees and bushes. The great length of their legs permits them to take long and unembarrassed steps and to move with great facility, nodding all the while with the most amusing gesticulations. A flock of Sandpipers on the beach where it is left open by the receding tide, employing themselves in gathering their repast of marine insects, always in motion, nodding their heads and bending their bodies as if they moved them on a pivot, now carelessly taking their food, then suddenly raising their heads upon a slight alarm, now moving in companies a short distance, then rising in a momentary flight, is, to the eye of a young sportsman, one of the most interesting sights in animated nature.

The interest we feel in these birds is caused by their picturesque assemblages in twittering flocks and by their peculiar cries. The voices of the sea-birds have a family resemblance. We can always distinguish their cries, which are shrill and piercing. Their notes are never low and could seldom be mistaken for those of land-birds. The Sandpipers afford great sport to young gunners, who overtake and surprise them upon the flats of solitary inlets when the tide is low. They arrive in dense flocks, alighting at the edge of the tide and taking the insects as they are uncovered; and the dashing of the waves close to their ranks causes them to be constantly flitting as they break at their feet. While we watch them there seems to be an active contention between them and the rippling edges of the water.

It is in winter that the picturesque movements of land-birds are most apparent. In summer and in autumn, before the fall of the leaf, birds are partially concealed by the foliage of trees and shrubs, so that the manner of their flight cannot be so easily observed. In winter, if we start a flock of them from the ground, we may watch all the peculiarities of their movements. I have alluded to the descent of Snow-Buntings upon the landscape as singularly beautiful; but the motions of a flock of Quails, when feeding in an open space in a wood or when suddenly alarmed, are equally interesting. When a Dove or a Swallow takes flight, its progress through the air is so rapid and the motions of its wings so undiscernible as to injure the beauty of its flight. We hardly observe anything so much as its rapidity. It is quite otherwise with the Quail. The body of this bird is plump and heavy and its wings short, with a peculiar concavity of the under surface when expanded. The motions of the wings are very rapid, and, having but little sweep, the bird seems to hang in the air, and is carried along moderately by a rapid vibration of the wings, describing about half a circle. Hence we see the shape of the bird during its flight.

Birds of prey are remarkable for their steady and graceful flight. The motions of their wings are slow, but they are capable of propelling themselves through the air with great rapidity. The circumgyrations of a Hawk, when reconnoitring far aloft in the heavens, are very picturesque, and have been used at all times to give character to certain landscape scenes in painting. A single picturesque attitude is sufficient to suggest a whole series of movements to one who has frequently watched them. The Raven and Crow are slow in their flight, which is apparently difficult. Hence these birds are easily overtaken and annoyed by smaller birds, which are ever watchful for an occasion to attack them without danger. Crows are not formed, like Falcons, to take their prey on the wing, and they cannot perform those graceful and difficult evolutions that distinguish the flight of birds of prey.

Small birds of the Sparrow tribe and some others generally move in an undulating course, alternately rising and sinking. The species that move in this way seldom fly to great heights, and are incapable of making a long journey without frequent intervals of rest. They perform their migrations by short daily stages. The flight of the little Sandpipers that frequent salt marshes in numerous flocks would be an interesting study. These birds are capable of sustaining an even flight in a perfectly horizontal line, only a few inches above the sandy beach. When they alight they seldom make a curve or gyration. They descend in a straight line, though obliquely. Snow-Buntings turn about, just before they reach the ground, and come down spirally. I have seen them perform the most intricate movements, like those of people in a cotillon, executed with the rapidity of arrows, when suddenly checked in their course by the discovery of a field covered with ripened grasses.

THE KINGFISHER.

If we leave the open field and wood, and ramble near the coast of some secluded branch of the sea we may be startled by the harsh voice of the Kingfisher, like the sound of the watchman's rattle. This bird is the celebrated Alcedo or Halcyon of the ancients, who attributed to it supernatural powers. It was supposed to construct its nest upon the waves, where it was made to float like a vessel at anchor. But as the turbulence of a storm would be likely to destroy it, Nature has gifted the sitting birds with the power of stilling the motion of the winds and waves during the period of incubation. The serene weather that accompanies the summer solstice was believed to be the enchanted effect of the benign influence of this family of birds. Hence the name of Halcyon days was applied to this period of tranquillity.

It is remarkable that fable should add to these supernatural gifts the power of song, as one of the accomplishments of the Kingfisher. This belief must have been very general among the ancients, and not confined to the Greeks and Romans. Some of the Asiatic nations still wear the skin of the Kingfisher about their persons as a protection against moral and physical evils. The feathers are used as love-charms; and it is believed, if the body of the Kingfisher be evenly fixed upon a pivot, it will turn its head to the north like the magnetic needle.

The Kingfisher is singularly grotesque in his appearance, though not without beauty of plumage. His long, straight, and quadrangular bill, his short and diminutive feet and legs, his immense head, and his plumage of dusky blue, with a bluish band on the breast, and a white collar around the neck, form a mixture of the grotesque and the beautiful which, considered in connection with his singularity of habits, may account for the superstitions that attach to his history. He sits patiently, like an angler, on a post at the head of a wharf, or on the trunk of a tree that extends over the bank, and, leaning obliquely with extended head and beak, he watches for his finny prey. There, with the light-blue sky above him and the dark-blue waves beneath, nothing on the surface of the water can escape his penetrating eyes. Quickly, with a sudden swoop, he seizes a single fish from an unsuspecting shoal, and announces his success by the peculiar sound of his rattle.

THE SPOTTED TATTLER.

A very interesting bird inhabiting the shores of seas and lakes is the Peetweet, or Spotted Tattler. The birds of this species breed in all parts of New England, arriving soon after the first of May, and assembling in occasional twittering flocks, skimming along the edges of some creek or inlet, most numerously after the tide has left the beach. In their circuitous flights they follow all the inequalities of the coast. It is amusing to watch their ways when they are preparing for incubation, restless and anxious, and uttering their lively and plaintive cry, like the syllables *peet-weet*, repeating the last with the rising inflection. They resemble the notes of the little Wood-Sparrow, when repeated many times in succession, except that the Tattler utters them without increasing their rapidity or varying their tone. These notes approach more nearly to music than those of any other bird of the sea or the shore.

The Tattlers build in the meadows among the rushes, sometimes in a tilled field and very near human dwellings, where they are seen roaming about with their young, like a hen with her chickens, searching for worms and grubs. They are very liable to be shot, while attracting attention by their lively motions and their low and musical flight. The young follow the parent as soon as they are hatched, when their downy plumage is of an almost uniform light-grayish color. If surprised, they immediately hide themselves among the herbage, while the parent by her motions and cries endeavors to draw attention exclusively to herself.

The birds of this species have been so wantonly and mercilessly hunted by gunners of all ages, that they have become extremely shy, and have lost all confidence in man. Yet, if they were harbored and protected from annoyance and danger, they would grow tame and confiding, and our fields and gardens would be full of them. A brood of them following the hen would be indefatigable hunters of insects in pastures and tilled lands. A few pairs with their young would perform incalculable service on every farm, and if encouraged and protected, would soon reward us with their confidence and their services. These little birds are incapable of doing any mischief, even if there were fifty of them on every farm. They take no fruit; they do not bite off the tops of tender herbs, like poultry; they are interesting in their ways; and the only cause of their scarcity is the destruction of them by gunners.

THE UPLAND PLOVER.

This is a species allied to the Peetweet, and well known by the name of Hill-Birds. They are of a solitary habit, not to be compared in utility and interest with the little Peetweet. They are seldom seen in flocks. We know them chiefly by their notes, which are familiar to all as heard at dawn or early evening twilight. These melancholy whistling notes are uttered as they pass from their feeding-places, while flying at a great height, and the hour of darkness when they are heard, and their plaintive modulation, render them the most striking sounds of a late summer evening.

THE GULL.

Among the birds which are most conspicuous about our coast, I should mention the Gulls. They are not very interesting birds; but their screaming voices remind us of their habitats, and their picturesque motions are familiar to all who are accustomed to the sea-shore. They associate in miscellaneous flocks, containing often several species, and enliven the hour and the prospect by their manœuvres and their peculiar cries. The Gull is distinguished by its small and lean body, which is covered with a great quantity of feathers. Its wings and head are very large, all uniting to give the bird a false appearance of size. Hence, I suppose, originated the word, when used to imply deception. The sportsman who for the first time has shot one of these birds, expecting to find it large and plump, and discovers only a miserable lean carcass imbedded in a large mass of feathers, is said to be gulled.

THE LOON.

I must not conclude without mentioning the Loon, one of the most romantic of birds, the Hermit of our northern lakes, and so exceedingly shy that it is rarely seen except at a great distance. This bird belongs to the family of Divers, so called from their habit of disappearing under the water at the moment when they catch a glimpse of any human being. The Loon inhabits the northern parts of Europe and North America, and is occasionally seen and heard in the lakes of New England, but chiefly now in those of Northern Maine. As population increases, this species retires to more solitary places.

In allusion to the scream of this bird, Nuttall says: "Far out at sea in winter and in the great northern lakes, I have often heard on a fine, calm morning the sad and wolfish call of the solitary Loon, which like a dismal echo seems slowly to invade the ear, and rising as it proceeds dies away in the air. This boding sound to the mariner, supposed to be indicative of a storm, may be heard sometimes for two or three miles, when the bird itself is invisible or reduced almost to a speck in the distance. The aborigines, almost as superstitious as sailors, dislike to hear the cry of the Loon, considering the bird, from its shy and extraordinary habits, as a sort of supernatural being. By the Norwegians it is with more appearance of reason supposed to portend rain."

FACTS THAT PROVE THE UTILITY OF BIRDS.

THE consequences which have followed the destruction of birds in many well-authenticated instances are sufficient to demonstrate their utility. Professor Jenks mentions a case communicated by one of his female correspondents. In former times, as she had been told by her father, an annual shooting-match was customary on election day in May. On one of these occasions, about the year 1820, in North Bridgewater, Mass., the birds were killed in such quantities that cart-loads of them were sent to farmers for compost. Then followed a great scarcity of birds in all that vicinity. The herbs soon showed signs of injury. Tufts of withered grass appeared and spread out widely into circles of a seared and burnt complexion. Though the cause and effect were so near each other, they were not logically put together by the inhabitants at that time. Modern entomology would have explained to them the cause of the phenomena, by the increase of the larva of insects which were previously kept in check by the birds destroyed at the shooting-match.

After the abolition of the game-laws in France, at the close of the last century, the people, having been accustomed to regard birds as the property of great land-owners, destroyed them without limit. Every species of game, including even the small singing-birds, was in danger of extermination. It was found necessary to protect them by laws that forbade hunting at certain seasons. The most serious evils were the consequence. The farmers' crops were destroyed by insects, and the orchards produced no fruit. It is only by such unfortunate experience that men can learn that the principal value of birds does not consist alone in their flesh or in their power of conferring pleasure by their songs.

Some years ago, in Virginia and North Carolina, several tracts of forest were attacked by a malady that caused the trees to perish over hundreds of acres. A traveller passing through that region inquired of a countryman if he knew the cause of the devastation. He replied that the mischief was all done by the woodpeckers, and though the inhabitants had killed great numbers of them, there still remained enough to bore into the trees and destroy them. The traveller, not satisfied with this account, made some investigations, and soon convinced them that the cause of the mischief was the larva of a species of Buprestis, which had multiplied without limits. This larva was the favorite food of the woodpeckers, which had congregated in that region lately on account of its abundance. He showed them that they were protecting the real destroyers of the forest by warring against the woodpeckers, which, if left unmolested, would soon eradicate the pest sufficiently to save the remaining timber. Birds become accustomed to certain localities, and if by any accident they should be exterminated in any one region insects of all kinds will increase, until the birds that consume them are slowly attracted to them from other parts.

In the year 1798, in the forests of Saxony and Brandenburg, the greater part of the trees, especially the conifers, died, as if struck at the roots by some secret malady. The foliage had not been attacked, and the trees perished without any manifest external cause. The Regency of Saxony sent naturalists and foresters to investigate the conditions. They proved the malady to be caused by the multiplication of a species of lepidopterous insects, which had in its larva state penetrated into the wood. Wherever a bough of fir or pine was broken, the larva was found, and had often hollowed it out even to the bark. The report of the naturalists declared that the extraordinary increase of this insect was owing to the entire disappearance of several species of titmouse, which for some years past had not been seen in that region.

According to an account given by Buffon, the Isle of Bourbon, where there were no grackles, was overrun with locusts imported in the eggs contained in the soil which with some plants had been brought from Madagascar. The Governor-General, as a means of extirpating these insects, caused several pairs of Indian grackles to be brought into the island. When the birds had considerably increased, some of the colonists, seeing them very diligent in the newly sown fields, imagined them in quest of the grain, and reported that they did more mischief than good. Accordingly they were proscribed by the Council, and in two hours after their sentence was pronounced, not a grackle was to be seen on the island. The people soon had cause for repentance. The locusts multiplied without check and became a pest. After a few years of experience, the grackles were again introduced, and their breeding and preservation were made a state affair. The birds multiplied and the locusts disappeared.

Kalm, a pupil of Linnæus, remarks in his "Travels in America," that after a great destruction of purple grackles for the legal reward of threepence per dozen, the Northern States in 1749 experienced a total loss of the grain and grass crops from the devastation of insects and their larva. The crows of North America were some years since so nearly exterminated, to obtain the premiums offered for their heads, that the increase of insects was alarming, and the States were obliged to offer bounties for the protection of crows. The same incidents have repeatedly happened in other countries, and ought to convince any reasoning mind that all the native species of insectivorous birds are needful, and that one or any number of species cannot perform the work which would have been done by the species that is extirpated.

"An aged man" of Virginia remarks, in "The Southern Planter" of 1860, that since his boyhood there has been a rapid decrease in the numbers of birds and a proportional increase of insects. Since their diminution great ravages have been committed on the farmers' crops by clover worms, wire-worms, cut-worms, and on the wheat crops particularly by chinch-bugs, Hessian flies, joint-worms, and other pests. All this is owing, he thinks, to the destruction and the scarcity of birds. He alludes particularly to the diminution of woodpeckers as a public calamity. He has known a community of red-headed woodpeckers to arrest the destructive progress of borers in a pine forest. He mentions the flicker or widgeon woodpecker — a common bird in New England — as the only bird he ever saw pulling out grubs from the roots of peach-trees. May not this habit of the flicker, which is a very shy bird because he is hunted for his flesh, be the cause why apple-trees that grow near a wood are not affected by borers?

The alarming increase of grasshoppers in some parts of the Western States, is undoubtedly the consequence of the wholesale destruction of quails, grouse, and other birds in that region.

SOUNDS FROM ANIMATE NATURE.

A TREATISE on the beauties of nature would be very imperfectly accomplished if nothing were written of sounds. The hearing is indeed the most intellectual of our senses, though from the sight we undoubtedly derive the most pleasure. Hearing is also more intimately connected with the imagination than any other sense; and a few words of speech or a few notes of music may produce the most vivid emotion or awaken the most ardent passion. At all seasons and in all places the sounds no less than the visible things of nature affect us with pleasure or with pain. Everywhere does the song of a bird or the note of an insect, the cry of an animal or other sound from the animate world, come to the ear with messages of the past, conveying to the mind some joyful or plaintive remembrance.

Sounds are the medium through which many ideas as well as sensations are communicated to us by nature; and we cannot say how large a proportion of those which seem to rise spontaneously in the mind are suggested by some animal, through its cries of joy or complaint. There is hardly a rational being who is not alive to these suggestions, varying with his habits of life, especially those of his early years. Some persons do not purposely listen to the voices of insects, and seem almost unaware of the existence of these sounds. Yet even these apathetic persons are unconsciously affected by them. We attend so little to the subjects of our consciousness that we can seldom trace to their source any of our most ordinary emotions. We see without conscious observation and hear without conscious attention, so that when we are suddenly deprived of these sights and sounds we feel that there is a blank in our enjoyments, which can be filled only by those charming objects that never before received our thought or attention. How many bright things have faded on our mind, and how many sweet sounds have died on the ear before we were hardly aware of their existence!

If we hearken attentively to the miscellaneous sounds that come to our ears from the outer world, we shall perceive that some of them are cheerful and exhilarating, others are melancholy and depressing. Of the first are chiefly the songs of birds, the noise of poultry, the chirping of insects; indeed, the greater part of the sounds of animate nature. The second class comes chiefly from inanimate things, as the whistling of winds, the murmur of gentle gales, the roar of storms, the rush of falling water, and the ebbing and flowing of tides. All these are of a plaintive character, sometimes gloomy and sad, at other times merely soothing and tranquillizing. They all produce more or less of what physicians call a sedative effect. These two classes of sounds are often inseparably blended, inasmuch as some of the voices of birds, insects, and other creatures are melancholy, and some of the sounds of winds and waters are cheerful.

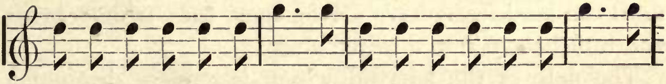
I shall treat of these different sounds chiefly as they affect the mind and sensibility; of the poetry rather than the science of these phenomena. My object is to point out one remarkable source of our agreeable sensations as derived from nature, and to show in what manner we may cause them to contribute to our pleasure. I am persuaded that one important means of deriving pleasure from any object is to direct our attention to it; and if this be not an indulgence that is liable to increase to a vicious extent, our happiness will be improved by our devotion to it. By studying the various sounds of nature and by habitually giving our attention to them, we become more and more sensitive to their influence and capable of hearing music to which others are deaf.

Cheerful sounds come chiefly from animated things; and from this we may infer that the mass of living creatures, in spite of the evils to which they are exposed and the pains they suffer, are happy. The chirping of insects denotes their happiness. No man goes out in the autumn and listens to the din of crickets and grasshoppers among the green herbs, and regards it as a melancholy sound. To all ears these notes express the joy of the creatures that utter them. Those doleful moralists who look upon everything as born to woe are greatly deluded; else why do not the voices of the sufferers give utterance to their pangs? Why, instead of uttering what seem like songs of praise, do they not cry out in doleful strains that would excite our pity? The greater part of the life of every creature is filled with agreeable sensations.

The fly, the gnat, the beetle, and the moth, though each makes a hum that awakens many pleasing thoughts and images, are not to be ranked among singing insects. Among the latter are crickets and locusts and grasshoppers, which are appointed by nature to take up their little lyre and drum after the birds have laid aside their more melodious pipe and flute. Their musical apparatus is placed outside of their bodies, and as they have no lungs, the air is obtained by a peculiar inflation of their chests. Hence the musical appendages of insects are constructed like reed instruments or jews'-harps. The grasshoppers in all ages have been noted as musical performers, and in certain ancient vignettes are frequently represented as playing on the harp.

Each species of insect has a peculiar modulation of his notes. The common green grasshopper, that during the months of August and September fills the whole atmosphere with its din, abides chiefly in the lowland meadows which are covered with the native grasses. This grasshopper modulates its notes like the cackling of a hen, uttering several chirps in rapid succession and following them with a loud spinning sound that seems to be the conclusion of the strain. These notes are continued incessantly, from the time when the sun is high enough to have dried the dews until dewfall in the evening. The performers are delighted with the sunshine, and sing but little on cloudy days, even when the air is dry and warm.

SONG OF THE DIURNAL GREEN GRASSHOPPER.



There is another grasshopper with short wings that makes a kind of grating sound difficult to be heard, by scraping its legs, that serve for bows, upon its sides, that represent as it were the strings of a viol. If we go into the whortleberry pastures we hear still another species, that makes a continued trilling like the note of a hairbird. In some places this species sings very loudly, and continues half a minute or more without rest. Its notes are not so agreeable as those which are more rapidly intermittent.

There is a species of locust, seldom heard until midsummer, and then only in very warm weather. His note is a pleasant reminder of sultry summer noondays, of languishing heat and refreshing shade. The insect begins low, usually high up in the trees, and increases in loudness until it is almost deafening, and then gradually dies away into silence. The most skilful musician could not surpass his crescendo and diminuendo. It has a peculiar vibrating sound that seems to me highly musical and expressive. The insect that produces this note is a grotesque-looking creature, resembling about equally a grasshopper and a humblebee.

The black crickets and their familiar chirping are well known to everybody. An insect of this family is celebrated in English poetry as the "cricket on the hearth." Those of the American species are seldom found in our dwelling-houses; but they are all around our door-steps and by the wayside, under every dry fence and in every sandy hill. They chirp all day and some part of the night, and more or less in all kinds of weather. They begin their songs before the grasshoppers are heard, and continue them to a later period in the autumn, not ceasing until the hard frosts have driven them into their retreats and lulled them into a torpid sleep.

The note of the katydid, which is a mere drumming sound, is not musical. In American literature no insect has become so widely celebrated, on account of a fancied resemblance to the word "katydid." To my ear a chorus of these minute drummers, all uttering in concert their peculiar notes, seems more like the hammering of a thousand little smiths in some busy hamlet of insects. There is no melody in these sounds, and they are accordingly less suggestive than those of the green nocturnal grasshopper, that is heard at the same hour in similar situations.

The nocturnal grasshoppers, called August pipers, or Cicadas, begin their chirping about the middle of July, but are not in full song until August. These are the true nightingales of insects, and the species that seems to me the most worthy of being consecrated to poetry. There is a singular plaintiveness in their low monotonous notes, which are the charm of our late summer evenings. There are but few persons who are not affected by these sounds with a sensation of subdued but cheerful melancholy. This effect does not seem to be caused by association so much as by their peculiar cadence.

The notes of these nocturnal pipers on very warm evenings are in unison and accurately timed, as if they were singing in concert. It is worthy of notice that they always vary their keynote according to the temperature of the atmosphere. They are evidently dependent on a summer heat for their vivacity, and become sluggish and torpid as the thermometer sinks below a certain point. When the temperature is high they keep good time, singing shrilly and rapidly. As it sinks they take a lower key and do not keep time together. When the thermometer is not above sixty, their notes are very low, and there are but few performers.

Height of Thermometer.	**Keynote of the Insects.**
80°	F natural, perfect time and tune.
75°	E flat, " " "
70°	D, " " "
65°	C, imperfect time and tune.
60°	B flat, " " "
55°	A, keynote hardly to be detected, many out of time and tune.
50°	G, a few individuals only, singing slowly and feebly.

JANUARY.

Poets in all ages have sung of the delights of seedtime and harvest, and of the voluptuous pleasures of summer; but when treating of winter, they have confined their descriptions to the sports of the season rather than to the beauties of Nature. Winter is supposed to furnish but few enjoyments to be compared with those of summer; because the majority of men, being oppressed by too many burdens, naturally yearn for a life of indolence. I will not deny that the pleasures derived from the direct influence of Nature are greatly diminished in cold weather; there are not so many interesting objects to amuse the mind, as in the season when all animated things are awake, and the earth is covered with vegetation; but there are many pleasant rural excursions and invigorating exercises which can be enjoyed only in the winter season, and for which thousands of our undegenerate yeomanry would welcome its annual visit.

The pleasures of a winter's walk are chiefly such as are derived from prospect. A landscape-painter could be but partially acquainted with the sublimity of terrestrial scenery, if he had never looked upon the earth when it was covered with snow. In summer the prospect unfolds such an infinite array of beautiful things to our sight, that the sublimity of the scene is hidden beneath a spectacle of dazzling and flowery splendor. We are then more powerfully attracted by objects of beauty that charm the senses than by those grander aspects of Nature that awaken the emotion of sublimity. In winter, the earth is divested of all those accompaniments of scenery which are not in unison with grandeur. At this period, therefore, the mind is affected with nobler thoughts; it is less bewildered by a multitude of fascinating objects, and is more free to indulge itself in a serious train of meditations.

The exhilaration of mind attending a winter walk in the fields and woods, when the earth is covered with snow, surpasses any emotion of the kind which is produced by the appearance of Nature at other seasons. We often hear in conversation of the invigorating effects of cold weather; yet those few only who are engaged in rural occupations, and who spend the greater part of the day in the open air, can fully realize the amount of physical enjoyment that springs from it. I can appreciate the languid recreations of a warm summer's day. When one is at leisure in the country he cannot fail to enjoy it, if he can take shelter under the canopy of trees or in the deeper shade of the forest. But these languid enjoyments would soon become oppressive and monotonous; and the constant participation of them must cause one gradually to degenerate into a mere animal. The human mind is constituted to feel positive pleasure only in action. Sleep and rest are mere negative conditions, to which we submit with a grateful sense of their power to fit us for the renewed exercise of the mind and the body.

In our latitude, at the present era January is usually the month of the greatest cold; and in severe weather there is a general stillness that is favorable to musing. The little streamlets are frozen and silent, and there is hardly any motion except of the winds, and of the trees that bend to their force. But the works of Nature are still carried on beneath the frost and snow. Though the flowers are buried in their hyemal sleep, thousands of unseen elements are present, all waiting to prepare their hues and fragrance, when the spring returns and wakes the flowers and calls the bees out from their hives. Nature is always active in her operations; and during winter are the embryos nursed of myriad hosts, that will soon spread beauty over the plains and give animation to the field and forest.

Since the beauties of summer and autumn have faded, Nature has bestowed on earth and man a brilliant recompense, and spread the prospect with new scenes of beauty and sublimity. The frozen branches of the trees are clattering in the wind, and the reed stands nodding above the ice and shivers in the rustling breeze. But while these things remind us of the chills of winter, the universal prospect of snow sends into the soul the light of its own perfect purity and splendor, and makes the landscape still beautiful in its desolation. Though we look in vain for a green herb, save where the ferns and mosses conceal themselves in little dingles among the rocks, yet the general face of the earth is unsurpassed in brilliancy. Morning, noon, and night exhibit glories unknown to any other season; and the moon is more lovely when she looks down from her starry throne and over field, lake, mountain, and valley, emblems the tranquillity of heaven.

It is pleasant to watch the progress and movements of a snow-storm while the flakes are thickly falling from the skies, and the drifts are rapidly accumulating along the sides of the fences and in the lanes and hollows. The peculiar motion of the winds, while eddying and whirling over the varied surface of the ground, is rendered more apparent than by any other phenomenon. Every curve and every irregular twisting of the wind is made palpable, to a degree that is never witnessed in the whirling leaves of autumn, in the sand of the desert, or in the dashing spray of the ocean. The appearance is less exciting when the snow descends through a perfectly still atmosphere, but after its cessation we may witness a spectacle of singular beauty. If there has been no wind to disturb the snow-flakes as they were deposited on the branches of the trees, to which they adhere, they hang from them like a drapery of muslin; then do we see throughout the woods the mimic splendor of June; and the plumage of snow suspended from the branches revives in fancy's eye the white clustering blossoms of the orchards in early summer.

Sometimes when the woods are fully wreathed in snow-flakes, and the earth is clothed in an interminable robe of ermine, the full moon rises upon the landscape and illumines the whole scene with a kind of unearthly splendor. If we wake out of sleep into a sudden view of this enchanted scene, though the mind be wearied and depressed, it is impossible, without rapture, to contemplate the etherial prospect. The unblemished purity of the snow-picture, before the senses are awakened to a full consciousness of our situation, glows upon the vision like a scene from that fairy world which has often gleamed upon the soul during its youthful season of romance and poetry. And when the early rays of morning penetrate these feathery branches and spread over the white and spotless hills of snow a rosy tinge, like the hues that burnish the clouds at sunset, and kindle amid the glittering fleece that is wreathed around the branches all the changeable colors of the rainbow, we are tempted to exclaim that the summer landscape with all its verdure and fruits and flowers was never more lovely than this transitory scene of beauty. Yet the brilliancy of this spectacle, like the rainbow in heaven, passes away almost while we are gazing on its fantastic splendor. A brisk current of wind scatters from the branches, like the fading leaves of autumn, all the false honors that have garlanded the forests, and in an hour they have disappeared forever.

Beside the pleasing objects already described as peculiar to the season, there are many beautiful appearances formed by the freezing of waters and the crystallization of vapors which one can never cease to examine with delight. One of the most brilliant spectacles of this kind is displayed on a frosty morning, after the prevalence of a damp sea-breeze. The crystals, almost imperceptibly minute, are distributed, like the delicate filaments of the microscopic mosses, over the withered herbs and leafless shrubbery, creating a sort of mimic vegetation in the late abodes of the flowers. Vast sheets of thin ice overspread the plains, beneath which the water has sunk into the earth, leaving the vacant spots of a pure whiteness, and forming hundreds of little fairy circles of a peculiarly fantastic appearance. The ferns and sedges that lift up their bended blades and feathers through the plates of ice, coated with millions of crystals, resemble, while sparkling in the rays of the sun, the finest jewelry. After a damp and frosty night, these appearances are singularly beautiful, and all the branches of the trees glitter with them as if surrounded with a network of diamonds.

THE WINTER BIRDS.

We are prone to set an extraordinary value upon all those pleasures that arrive in a season when they are few and unexpected. Hence the peculiar charms of the early flowers of spring, and of those, equally delightful, that come up to cheer the short and melancholy days of November. The winter birds, though they do not sing, are interesting on account of the season. The Chickadees and Speckled Woodpeckers, that tarry with us in midwinter and make the still, cold days lively and cheerful by their merry voices, are in animated nature what flowers would be if we saw them wreathing their forms about the leafless trees. Nature does not permit at any season an entire dearth of those sources of enjoyment that spring from observation of the external world. As there are evergreen mosses and ferns that supply in winter the places of the absent flowers, so there are chattering birds that linger in the wintry woods; and Nature has multiplied the echoes at this time, that their few and feeble voices may be repeated by lively reverberations among the hills.

To those who look upon the earth with the feelings of a poet or a painter, I need not speak of the value of the winter birds as enliveners of the landscape. Any circumstance connected with natural scenery that exercises our feelings of benevolence adds to the picturesque charms of a prospect. No man can see a little bird or quadruped at this time without feeling a lively interest in its welfare. The sight of a flock of Snow-Buntings, descending like a shower of meteors upon a field of grass and eagerly devouring the seeds contained in the drooping panicles that extend above the snow-drifts; of a company of Crows, rejoicing with noisy sociability over some newly discovered feast in the pine-wood; of the parti-colored Woodpeckers winding round the trees and hammering upon their trunks,—all these and many other sights and sounds are associated with our ideas of the happiness of these creatures; and while our benevolent feelings are thus agreeably exercised, the objects that cause our emotions add a positive charm to the dreary aspects of winter. These reflections have led me to regard the birds and other interesting animals as having a value to mankind not to be estimated in dollars and cents, and which is entirely independent of any services they may render the farmer or the orchardist by preventing the over-multiplication of noxious insects.

The greater number of small birds that remain in northern latitudes during winter, except the Woodpeckers, are such as live chiefly upon seeds. Those insectivorous species that gather their food chiefly from the ground, like the Thrushes and the Blackbirds, are obliged to migrate or starve. Thus the common Robins are almost exclusively insect-feeders, using fruit, that serves them rather as dessert than substantial fare. A bird that never devours seeds or grain or any farinaceous food, depending on insects and grubs that may be gathered from the surface of the ground, cannot subsist in our latitude save in mild and open winters. During such favorable seasons Robins in small parties are often seen collecting their fare of dormant insects from the open ground. The Robin, a bird that should hardly be called migratory, never proceeds any farther south than is necessary to keep him from starvation. Robins perform their migrations only as they are driven by the snow. If on any years, as sometimes happens, a large quantity of snow should cover the territory of the Middle States as early as the first of November, while north of them the ground remained uncovered, the Robins would be retarded in their journey, which is not a continued migration, and tarry with us in unusual numbers. A great many of them would perish with hunger or be reduced to the necessity of feeding on the berries of the juniper and viburnum, if they should be overtaken by snow covering a wide surface that cuts off their supplies of dormant insects.

The Quail is not so liable to be starved, because, like the common domestic hen, it is omnivorous. Quails may be kept through the winter if fed exclusively on grain. Hence, if it were not for the persecution they suffer from mankind, they would be common residents with us in winter, keeping themselves under the protection of sheds and border shrubbery and gleaning their subsistence from cornfields, and often associating with the poultry in the farm-yard. If they had been encouraged by man in a state of half-domestication, either for the use of their flesh or as consumers of grubs and insects, they might still have been common. Instead of being buried in snow in the woods, they would have crept into our barns and found safety in the hospitality of man, and would have rewarded his kindness by their invaluable services upon the farm. But man is only a half-reasoning animal. The blood of the ape still courses in his veins, rendering him incapable of understanding the value of thousands of creatures which he destroys.

The Woodpeckers and their allied families, though insectivorous, are not often distressed by the winter. Gathering all their food, consisting of larva and dormant insects, from the bark and wood of trees, the snow cannot conceal it for any perilous length of time, and only a coating of ice, that seldom outlasts more than a day or two, and covers only one side of a branch, can cause them much trouble. The quantity of their insect food is less than in summer, but the birds that winter here have about as much of it, because other species are diminished that divide with them this spoil in summer. Hence, Woodpeckers, Tomtits, and Creepers are not obliged to migrate. They simply scatter more widely over the country, instead of remaining in the woods, and thus accommodate themselves to the more limited supply of food in any given space. The Swallows and Flycatchers, that take their food in the air, are the first to migrate, because the aerial insects are vastly and suddenly diminished by the early frosts of autumn.

It is not often that we are led to reflect upon the extreme loneliness that would prevail in solitary places in winter, were all the birds to migrate at this season to a warmer climate, or to sink into a torpid state like frogs and dormice and tardy families of Swallows. But Nature, to preserve the cheerfulness of this season, has endowed certain birds with power to endure the severest cold and with the faculty of providing for their wants at a time when it would seem that there was not food enough in the hidden stores of the season to preserve them from starvation. The woodman, however insensible he may be to the charms of all such objects, is gladdened and encouraged in his toils by the sight of these lively creatures, some of which, like the Jay and the Woodpecker, are adorned with the most beautiful plumage, and are all pleasantly garrulous, filling the otherwise silent woods with frequent and vociferous merriment.

In my early days, for the supposed benefit of my health, I passed a winter in Tennessee, and, being unoccupied, except with my studies, I made almost daily journeys into the woods a few miles from the city of Nashville. It was at this season that I experienced the full power of the winter birds to give life and beauty to the faded scenes of nature. Though not one was heard to sing, they seemed as active and as full of merriment as in the early summer. The most attractive birds on this occasion were the Woodpeckers, of which several species were very numerous. Conspicuous among them was the Carpenter Bird, or Pileated Woodpecker, — a bird with rusty black plumage, a red crest and mustaches, and a white stripe on each side of the neck; one of the largest of the family. His loud croaking might be heard at any time in the deep woods, and his great size and his frequent hammering upon the resounding boles of decayed trees were very attractive.

A more beautiful but smaller species was the Red-headed Woodpecker, with head and neck and throat of crimson, and other parts of his plumage variously marked with white and changeable blue. This species, though seldom seen in Eastern Massachusetts, is a common resident in this latitude west of the Green Mountain range. The birds of this species were very numerous, and during my rambles the woods were constantly flashing with their bright colors as they flitted among the trees. They were sometimes joined by the Redbreasted Woodpecker, hardly less beautiful.

It is impossible to describe the charm which these birds gave to the otherwise solitary woods. I would sometimes remain a whole day there, watching the manners of these and hundreds of other beautiful birds, that were strangers to me, taking my dinner with the squirrels, upon the fruit of the black walnut-tree, which was strewn over all the ground. The loud croaking of the Log-cock, the cackling screams of the Red-headed Woodpecker, and the solemn tolling of the Redbreast, blended with the occasional cooing of Turtle-Doves, made a sylvan entertainment that rendered my winter rambles at this period and in these woods as interesting as any I ever pursued in summer or autumn.

In our latitude, after the first flight of snow has covered the ground, many winter birds, pressed by hunger, are compelled to make extensive forages in quest of food. Our attention is especially drawn toward them at such times, and many parties of them will visit our neighborhood in the course of the day, while, if no snow had fallen, they would have confined themselves to a more limited range. One of the most attractive sights on such occasions is caused by flocks of Snow-Buntings usually assembled in great numbers. They are chiefly seen when the snow compels them to fly from place to place in quest of food. They are not birds of ill-omen, as might be inferred from the name of *bad-weather birds* given them in Sweden; for they do not appear until the storm is over.

Few sights are more picturesque than these flocks of Snow-Buntings, whirling with the subsiding winds and moving as if they were guided by an eddying breeze, now half concealed by the direction in which they meet the rays of the sun, then suddenly flashing as with a simultaneous turn they present the under white side of their wings to the light of day. The power of these diminutive creatures to endure the cold of winter and to contend with the storm attaches to their appearance a character allied to sublimity. I cannot look upon them, therefore, in any other view than as important parts in that ever-changing picture of light, motion, and beauty with which Nature benevolently consoles us for those evils assigned by fate to all the inhabitants of the earth.

The common Snowbirds, of a bluish-slate color, are not so often seen in large compact flocks. They go usually in scattered parties, and are seen in the southern parts of New England only in winter and early spring, arriving from the northern regions late in the autumn. Wilson considers them more numerous than any other species on the American continent, swarming in multitudes over all the country down to the borders of the Gulf of Mexico. It is a marvel to him, therefore, that no part of these immense hosts should remain in the summer to breed at a latitude below that of 45° or 50°, except in the high mountain-ranges. They have many of the habits of the common Hairbird, which is by some of our countrymen supposed to be the same species, changed in appearance by the winter. Like the Hairbird, they assemble round our houses and barns, picking up seeds or crumbs of bread and other fragments of food.

They differ entirely from the Buntings, which, for distinction, are called White Snowbirds. They are quite equal to them in their power of enduring the cold and in sustaining the force of a tempest. During a snowstorm they may often be seen sporting as it were in the very whirlpool of driving snows, and alighting upon the tall weeds and sedges, and eagerly gathering their products. The Hempbird will sometimes join their parties, and his cheerful and well-known twitter may be heard, as he hurriedly flits from one bush to another, hunting for the seeds of goldenrods and asters. The cause of the migration of these birds from their native north is not probably the severe cold of those regions, but the deep snows that bury up their cereal stores at an early season. They live upon seeds; hence their forages are made chiefly in tilled lands, where weeds afford them an abundant harvest. The negligence of the tiller of the soil is therefore a great gain to the small birds, by leaving a supply of seeds in the annual grasses that grow thriftily with his crops.

Early in the spring the little Blue Snowbirds again appear, but are not so familiar as in the beginning of winter. They are often seen in a thicket in companies, warbling softly and melodiously. Nuttall says their song resembles that of the European Robin Redbreast. He also remarks that the males have severe contests when they are choosing their mates.

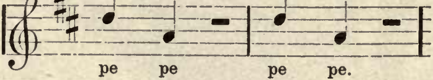
THE CHICKADEE.

There are but few persons who have spent their winters in the country, who would not agree with me that to the lively notes of the Chickadee we are indebted for a great part of the cheerfulness that attends a winter's walk. His notes are not a song; but there is a liveliness in their sound, uttered most frequently on a pleasant winter's day, causing them to be associated with all agreeable changes of the weather. The Chickadees are not seen, like Snowbirds, most numerously after a fall of snow. Their habits are nearly the same in all weathers, except that they are more prone to be noisy and loquacious on pleasant, sunny days.

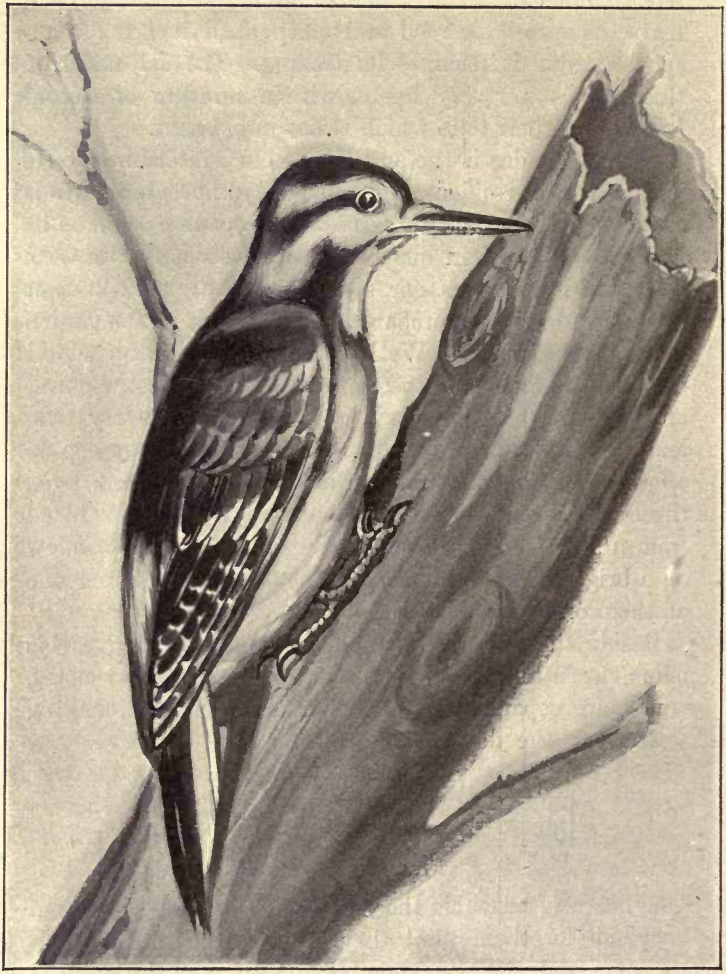
The sounds from which the Chickadee has derived its name appear to be its call-notes, like the gobbling of a turkey, and enable the birds while scattered singly over the forest to signalize their presence to others of their own species. It may be observed that when the call-note is rapidly repeated, a multitude of them will immediately assemble near the place where the alarm was given. When no alarm is intended to be given, the bird utters these notes but seldom, and chiefly as it passes from one tree to another. It is probably accustomed to hearing a response, and if one is not soon heard it will repeat the call until it is answered. For as these birds do not forage the woods in flocks, this continued hailing is carried on between them, to satisfy their desire not to remain entirely alone. A similar conversation passes between a flock of chickens when scattered over a field and out of sight of one another. One, on finding itself alone, will leave its quest for food and chirp until it hears a response, when it resumes its feeding. The call-notes of this species are very lively, with a mixture of querulousness in their tone which is not unpleasant.

The Chickadee is the smallest of our winter birds. He is a permanent resident, and everybody knows him. He is a lively chatterer and an agreeable companion; and as he never tarries long in one place, he does not tire us with his garrulity. He is our attendant on all our pleasant winter walks, in the orchard and the wood, in the garden and by the roadside. We have seen him on still winter days flitting from tree to tree, with the liveliest motions and the most engaging attitudes, examining every twig and branch, and after a few sprightly notes hopping to another tree, to pass through the same manœuvres. Even those who are confined to the house are not excluded from a sight of these birds. We cannot open a window on a bright winter's morning without a greeting from one of them on the nearest tree.

Beside the note from which the Chickadee derives his name, he utters occasionally two very plaintive notes, which are separated by a true musical interval, making a third on the descending scale.



They slightly resemble those of the Pewee, and are often mistaken for them; but they are not drawling or melancholy, and do not slide from one note to another without an interval. I do not know the circumstances that prompt the bird to repeat this plaintive strain; but it is uttered both in summer and winter. It has, therefore, no connection with love or the care of the



DOWNY WOODPECKER

offspring. Indeed, there is such a variety in the notes uttered at different times by this bird, that if they were repeated in uninterrupted succession, they would form one of the most agreeable of woodland melodies.

The Chickadee is not a singing-bird. He utters his usual notes at all times of the year; but in the early part of summer he is addicted to a low and pleasant kind of warbling, considerably varied and wanting only more loudness and precision to entitle him to rank among the singing-birds. This warbling seems to be a sort of soliloquizing for his own amusement. If it were uttered by the young birds only, we might suppose them to be taking lessons in music and that this was one of their first attempts. I have heard a Golden Robin occasionally warbling in a similar manner.

THE DOWNY WOODPECKER.

In company with the Chickadees, we often see two speckled Woodpeckers, differing apparently only in size, each having a small red crest. The smaller of the two is the Downy Woodpecker. The birds of this species are called Sap-suckers, from their habit of making perforations in the sound branches of trees, through the bark, without penetrating the wood, as if for the purpose of obtaining the sap. These perforations are often in two or three parallel circles around the branch, very close together, and it is probable that they follow the path of a grub that is concealed under the bark. Wilson examined many trees that were perforated in this manner, and saw evidence that they suffered no harm from it. But why the bird should be so precise and formal in his markings of the tree is a mystery not yet satisfactorily explained.

The Woodpecker, however, takes a great part of his food from the inside of the wood or bark of the tree. Hence he is not so diligent in his examination of the outside of the branch as the Chickadee. He examines those parts only where he hears the scratching or gnawing of the grub that is concealed beneath the surface, bores the wood to obtain it, and then flies off. The Chickadee looks for insects on or near the surface, and does not confine his search to trees. He examines fences, the under parts of the eaves of houses, and the wood-pile, and destroys in the course of his foraging many an embryo moth or butterfly which would become the parent of noxious larva. The Woodpecker is often represented as the emblem of industry; but the Chickadee is more truly emblematical of this virtue, and the Woodpecker of perseverance, as he never tires when drilling into the wood of a tree in quest of his prey.

THE HAIRY WOODPECKER.

The Hairy Woodpecker is larger than the preceding species, and their difference in size is almost the only notable distinction. It derives its name from the resemblance of some of the feathers on its back to hairs. This Woodpecker is not so often seen in summer as the smaller species, but both are about equally noticeable in winter The nest is made in holes excavated by its own labor for this purpose in the trunk or branches of old trees. The bird commonly selects a dried and partially decayed limb, because it is more easily excavated after the hole is drilled through the outside.

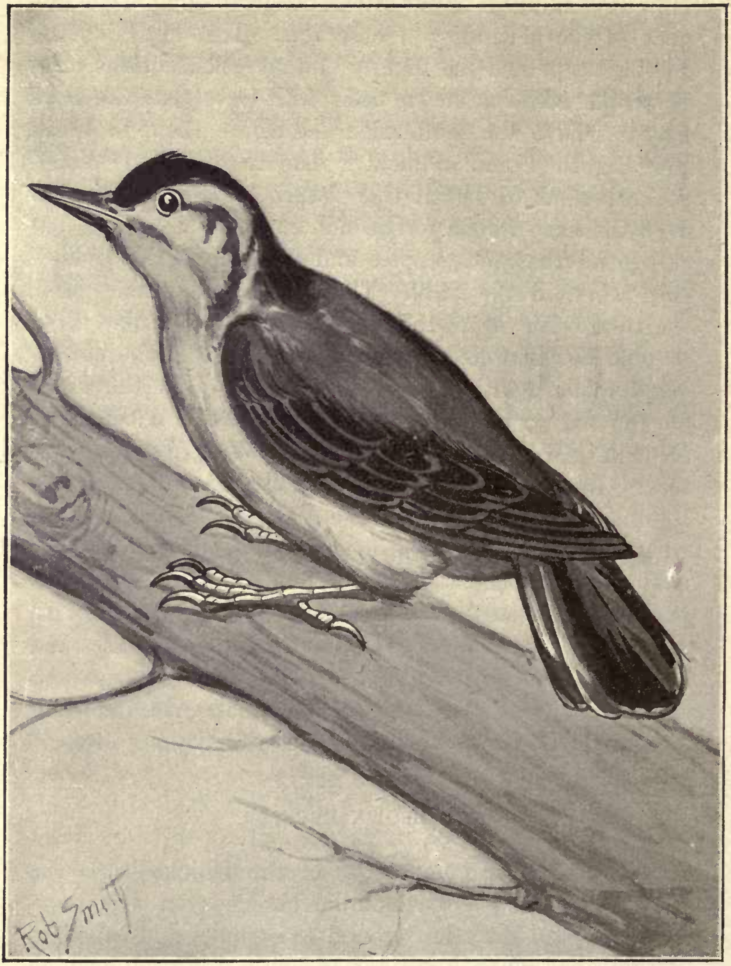
THE RED-HEADED WOODPECKER.

This is the most beautiful of our Woodpeckers and nearly as large as a Robin. It is not often seen in the

New England States, but often enough to be an acquaintance of the generality of observers. This bird, like the Robin, has gained the enmity of that conscientious class of people who cut down their fruit-trees that the boys may not have the temptation set before them to break the Eighth Commandment. The Red-headed Woodpecker seems to be in this respect more mischievous even than the Robin, for he not only takes cherries, but carries off the finest apples and feeds upon the Indian-corn when in the milk. The question is often raised, therefore, with regard to the usefulness of this bird; and it will be answered according as the person interrogated takes a view of its general utility in the economy of nature, or of its mischievousness as a consumer of fruit. Mr. George W. Rice, of West Newton, preserves his cherry-trees for the exclusive benefit of the Robins. If they do not take all the cherries, he has what they leave; but he considers the fruit more valuable for the benefit of the Robins than for any other purpose. Perhaps, however, since all men are not so wise, we should say, "Cut down all your fruit-trees and imitate the generosity of those men whom we occasionally hear of, who choose to perform this sacrifice of their own property rather than to shoot the boys."

THE BROWN CREEPER.

Another of the companions of the Chickadee is the Brown Creeper, a bird of similar habits, often seen moving in a spiral direction around the trunks and branches of trees, and when conscious of being observed, keeping on the farther side of a branch. He is more frequently seen in winter than in summer, when he is concealed by the foliage. The different birds I have named as companions of the Chickadee often assemble by seeming



WHITE-BREAST NUTHATCH

accident in considerable numbers upon one tree, and, meeting perhaps more company than is agreeable to them, they make the wood resound with their noisy disputes. They may have been assembled by some note of alarm, and on finding no particular cause for it, they raise a shout that reminds us of the extraordinary vociferation with which young men and boys in the country conclude a false alarm of fire in the early part of the night. These birds are not gregarious, and, though fond of the presence of a few of their own kind, are vexed when they find themselves in a crowd.

THE NUTHATCH.

The Nuthatch is often found in these assemblages, and may be recognized by his piercing, trumpet-like note. This bird resembles the Woodpecker in the shape of the bill, but has only one hinder toe instead of two. He is a permanent inhabitant of the cold parts of the American continent, resembling the Titmouse in his diligence and activity, and in his manners while in quest of his insect food.

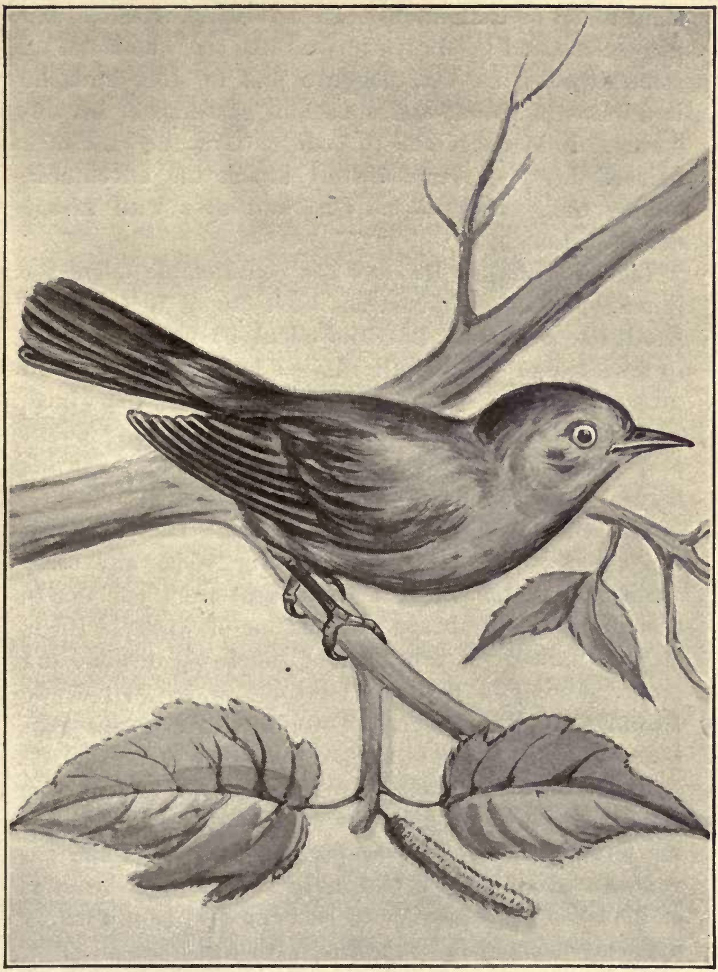
There are times when even the birds I have described in this essay, that collect their food from the bark and wood of trees, are driven to great extremities. When the trees are incased in ice, which, though not impenetrable by their strong bills, prevents their discovery of their food, they are in danger of starving. At such times the gardens and barnyards are frequented by large numbers of Woodpeckers, Creepers, and Nuthatches. Driven by this necessity from their usual haunts, a piece of suet fastened firmly to the branch of a tree, at any time of the winter, would soon be discovered by them and afford them a grateful repast. I have frequently assembled them under my windows by this allurement.

THE BLUE-JAY.

If we visit any part of the forest or live near it in the winter, we are sure to be greeted by the voice of the lively Blue Jay, another of our well-known winter birds. He has a beautiful outward appearance, under which he conceals an unamiable temper and a propensity to mischief. There is no bird in our forest that is arrayed in equal splendor. His neck of fine purple, his pale, azure crest and head with silky plumes, his black crescent-shaped collar, his wings and tail-feathers of bright blue with stripes of white and black, and his elegant form and vivacious manners render him attractive to every visitor of the woods.

But with all his beauty, he has, like the Peacock, a harsh voice. He is a thief and a disturber of the peace. He is a sort of Ishmael among the feathered tribes, who are startled at the sound of his voice and fear him as a bandit. The farmer, who is well acquainted with his habits, is no friend to him; for he takes not only what is required for his immediate wants, but hoards a variety of articles in large quantities for future use. It would seem as if he were aware when engaged in an honest and when in a dishonest expedition. While searching for food in the field or the open plain, he is extremely noisy; but when he ventures into a barn to take what does not belong to him, he is silent and stealthy and exhibits all the peculiar manners of a thief.

It would be no mean task to enumerate all the acts of mischief perpetrated by this bird, and I cannot but look upon him as one of the most guilty of the winged inhabitants of the wood. He plunders the cornfield both at seed-time and harvest; he steals every edible substance he can find and conceals it in his hiding-places; he destroys the eggs of smaller birds and devours their young.



BLUE JAY

He quarrels with all other species, and his life is a constant round of contentions. He is restless, irascible, and pugnacious, and he always appears like one who is out on some expedition. Yet, though a pest to other birds, he is a watchful parent and a faithful guardian of his offspring. It is dangerous to venture near the nest of a pair of Jays, who immediately attack the adventurer, aiming their blows at his face and eyes with savage determination.

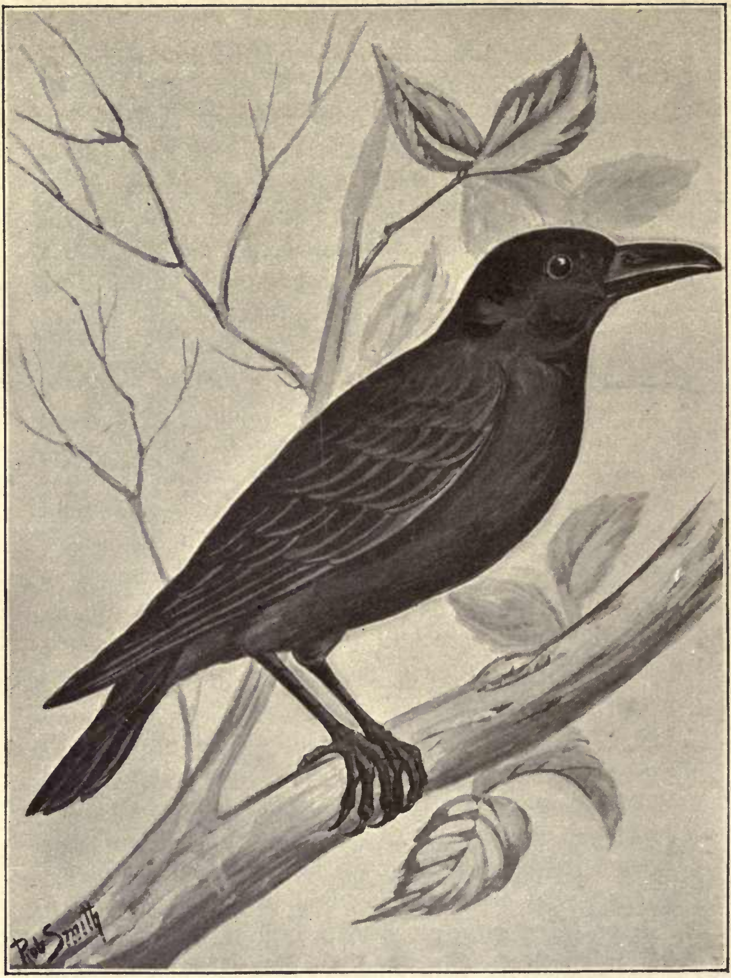
Like the Magpie, the Jay has considerable talent for mimicry, and when tamed has been taught to articulate words like a parrot. But this talent he never exercises in a wild state. At certain times I have heard this bird utter a few notes, like the tinkling of a bell, and which, if syllabled, might form such a word as *dilly-lily;* but it is not a musical strain. Indeed, there is no music in his nature; he is fit only for "stratagems and spoils."

The Blue-Jay is a true American. He is known throughout the continent, and never visits any other country. At no season is he absent from our woods, though his voice always reminds me of winter. He is also an industrious consumer of the larger insects and grubs, atoning in this way for some of his evil deeds. I cannot say, therefore, that I would consent to his banishment, for he is one of the most cheering tenants of the groves at a season when they have but few inhabitants; and I never listen to his voice without a crowd of charming reminiscences of pleasant winter excursions and adventures at an early period of life. The very harshness of his voice has caused it to be impressed more forcibly upon my memory in connection with these scenes.

THE CROW.

The common Crow is the representative in America of the European Rook, resembling it in many of its habits. In Europe, where land is more valuable than in this country, and where agriculture is carried on with an amount of skill that would astonish an American, the people are not so jealous of the birds. In Great Britain, rookeries are permanent establishments; and the Rooks, notwithstanding the mischief they do, are protected on account of their services to agriculture. The farmers of Europe, having learned by experience that without the aid of mischievous birds their crops would be sacrificed to the more destructive insect race, forgive them their trespasses as we forgive the trespasses of cats and dogs, who in the aggregate are vastly more destructive than birds. The respect shown to birds by any people seems to bear a certain ratio to the antiquity of the nation. Hence the sacredness with which they are regarded in Japan, where the population is so dense that the inhabitants would not consent to divide the products of their fields with the feathered race unless their usefulness had been demonstrated.

The Crow is one of the most unfortunate of birds in all his relations to man; for by the public he is regarded with hatred, and every man's hand is against him. He is protected neither by custom nor by superstition; the sentimentalist cares nothing for him as a subject of romance, and the utilitarian is blind to his services as a scavenger. The farmer considers him as the very ringleader of mischief, and uses all the means he can invent for his destruction; the friend of the singing-birds bears him a grudge as the destroyer of their eggs and their young; and even the moralist is disposed to condemn him for his cunning and dissimulation.



CROW

Hence he is everywhere hunted and persecuted, and the expedients used for his destruction are numerous and revolting to the sensibility. He is outlawed by legislative bodies; he is hunted with the gun; he is caught in crow-nets; he is hoodwinked with bits of paper smeared with birdlime, to which he is attracted by means of a bait; he is poisoned with grain steeped in hellebore and strychnine; the reeds in which he roosts are treacherously set on fire; he is pinioned by his wings, and placed on his back, and made to grapple his companions who come to his rescue. Like an infidel, he is not allowed the benefit of truth to save his reputation; and children, after receiving lessons of humanity, are taught to regard the Crow as an unworthy subject, if they were to carry the precepts taught them into practice. Every government has set a price upon his head, and public sentiment holds him up to execration.

As an apology for these atrocities his persecutors enumerate a long catalogue of misdemeanors of which he is guilty. He pillages the cornfields and pulls up the young shoots of maize to obtain the kernels attached to their roots. He destroys the eggs and young of harmless birds which are our favorites; he purloins fruit from the garden and orchard, and carries off young ducks and chickens from the farm-yard. Beside his mischievous propensities and his habits of thieving, he is accused of deceit and of a depraved disposition. He who would plead for the Crow will not deny the general truth of these accusations, but, on the other hand, would enumerate certain special benefits which he confers upon man.

In the list of services performed by this bird we find many details that should lead us to pause before we consent to his destruction. He consumes vast quantities of grubs, worms, and noxious vermin; he is a valuable scavenger, clearing the land of offensive masses of decaying animal substances; he hunts the grass-fields and pulls out and devours various cutworms and caterpillars, wherever he perceives the marks of their presence as evinced by the wilted stalks; he destroys mice, young rats, and lizards and the smaller serpents; and, lastly, he is a volunteer sentinel upon the farm and drives the Hawk from its enclosures. It is chiefly during seed-time and harvest that the depredations of the Crow are committed. During the remainder of the year his acts are all benefits, and so highly are his services appreciated by those who have written on birds that there is hardly an ornithologist that does not plead for his protection.

Let us turn our attention for a moment to his moral qualities. In vain is he condemned for cunning when without this quality he could not live. His wariness is a virtue, and, surrounded as he is by all kinds of perils, it is his principal means of self-preservation. He has no system of faith and no creed to which he is under obligations to offer himself as a martyr. His cunning is his armor; and I am persuaded that the persecutions which he has always suffered have caused the development of an amount of intelligence that elevates him many degrees above the majority of the feathered race. Hence there are few birds that equal the Crow in sagacity. He observes many things that could be understood, it would seem, only by human intelligence. He judges with accuracy from the deportment of the person approaching him, if he is prepared to do him an injury, and seems to pay no regard to one who is strolling the fields in search of flowers or for recreation. On such occasions you may come so near him as to observe his manners and even to note the varying shades of his plumage. But in vain does the gunner endeavor to approach him. So sure is he to fly at the right moment for his safety that one might suppose he could measure the distance of gunshot.

The cawing of the Crow seems to me unlike any other sound in nature. It is not melodious, though less harsh than that of the Jay. It is said that when domesticated he is capable of imitating human speech, though he cannot sing. But Æsop mistook the character of this bird when he represented him as the dupe of the fox, who gained the bit of cheese he carried in his mouth by persuading him to exhibit his musical powers. The Crow could not be fooled by any such appeals to his vanity.

The Crow is justly regarded as a homely bird ; yet he is not without beauty. His coat of glossy black with violet reflections, his dark eyes and sagacious expression of countenance, his stately and graceful gait, and his steady and equable flight, all give him a proud and dignified appearance. The Crow and the Raven have always been celebrated for their gravity, — a character that seems to be caused by their black, sacerdotal vesture and by certain peculiar manifestations of intelligence in their ways and general deportment. Indeed, any one who should watch the motions of the Crow for five minutes, when he is stalking alone in the field or when he is careering with his fellows around some tall tree in the forest, would not fail to see that he deserves to be called a grave bird.

Setting aside all considerations of the services rendered by the Crow to agriculture, I esteem him for certain qualities which are agreeably associated with the charms of nature. It is not the singing-birds alone that contribute by their voices to gladden the husbandman and cheer the solitary traveller. The crowing of the cock at the break of day is as joyful a sound, though unmusical, as the voice of the Robin, who chants his lay at the same early hour. To me the cawing of the Crow is cheering and delightful, and it is heard long before the generality of birds have left their perch.

SOUNDS FROM INANIMATE NATURE.

Nature in every scene and situation has established sounds which are indicative of their character. The sounds we hear in the hollow dells among the mountains are unlike those of the open plains; and the echoes of the sea-shore repeat sounds never reverberated in the inland valleys. The murmuring of wind and the rustling of foliage, the gurgling of streams and the bubbling of fountains, come to our ears like the music of our early days, accompanied with many agreeable fancies. A stream rolling over a rough declivity, a fountain bubbling up from a subterranean hollow, give sounds suggestive of fragrant summer arbors, of cool retreats and all their delightful accompaniments.

The most agreeable expression from the noise of waters is their animation. They give life to the scenes around us, like the voices of birds and insects. In winter especially they make an agreeable interruption of the general stillness, and remind us that during the slumber of all visible things some hidden power is still guiding the operations of Nature. The rapids produced by a small stream flowing over some gentle declivity yield, perhaps, the most expressive sound of waters, save the distant roar of waves as they are dashed upon the sea-shore. The last, being intermittent, is preferable to the roar of a waterfall, which is tiresomely incessant. Nearly all the sounds made by water are agreeable, and cannot be multiplied without increasing the delightful influences of the place and the season.

Each season of the year has its peculiar melodies beside those proceeding from animated objects. In the opening of the year, when the leaves are tender and pliable, there is a mellowness in the sound of the breezes, as if they felt the voluptuous influence of spring. Nature then softens all the sounds from inanimate things, as if to avoid making any harsh discords with the anthem that issues from the woodlands, vocal with the songs of myriads of happy creatures. The echoes repeat less distinctly the multitudinous notes of birds, insects, and reptiles. To the echoes spring and summer are seasons of comparative rest, save when residing among the rocks of the desert or among the crags of the sea-shore. Here sitting invisibly in these retreats, they are ever responding to the melancholy sounds that are borne upon the waves as they sullenly recount the perils and accidents of the great deep.

But there are reverberations which are too refined and subtle to be distinguished as echoes. All creation, indeed, is a vast assemblage of musical instruments, whose chords vibrate to every sound in Nature. Every sound that peals over the landscape is in communication with millions of harps whose strings give out some response in harmony with the season and situation. As every ray of light coming from the farthest perceptible distance in the universe is repeated millions of times in various forms of beauty from dews and gems and flowers, — in the same manner do the sounds in the atmosphere vibrate from every spear of grass and every leaf of the forest, producing some unconscious pleasure.

After the frosts of autumn the winds become shriller as they pass over the naked reeds and rushes and through the leafless branches of the trees, and there is a familiar sadness in their murmurs, as they whirl among the dry rustling leaves. When the winter has arrived and enshrouded all the landscape in snow, the echoes venture out once more on the open plain, and repeat with unusual distinctness the various sounds from wood, village, and farm. During the winter they enjoy a long heyday of freedom; they hold a laughing revelry in the haunts of the dryad, and seem to rejoice as they sing together over the desolate appearance of Nature.

When the sun gains a few more degrees in his meridian height, and the snow begins to disappear under the fervor of his beams, then do the sounds from the dropping eaves and the clash of falling icicles from the boughs of the orchard-trees afford a pleasant sensation of the change; and the utterance of these vernal promises awakens all the delightful anticipations of birds and flowers. The moaning of winds has been plainly softened by the new season, and the summer zephyrs, that occasionally pay us a short visit from the south, and signalize their coming by the crimsoned dews at sunrise, loosen a thousand rills, that make lively music as they leap down the hillsides into the valleys. Yet of all these sounds from inanimate Nature, there is not one but is hallowed by some glad or tender sentiment, of which it is suggestive, and we have but to yield our hearts to their influences to feel that for the ear as well as for the eye, Nature has provided an endless store of pleasure.

I believe the agreeable sounds from the inanimate world owe their principal effect to their power of gently exciting the sentiment of melancholy. The murmur of gentle gales among the trembling aspen-trees, the noise of the hurricane upon the sea-shore, the roar of distant waters, the sighing of wind as it flits by our windows and moans through the casement, have the power of exciting just enough of the sentiment of melancholy to produce an agreeable state of the mind. Along with the melancholy they excite there is something that tranquillizes the soul and exalts it above the mere pleasures of sense.

It is this power to produce the sentiment of melancholy that causes the sound of rain to afford pleasure. The pattering of rain upon our windows, but more especially upon the roof of the house under which we are sitting, is attended with a singular charm. There are few persons who do not recollect with a sense of delight some adventure in a shower, that obliged them on a journey to take shelter under a rustic roof by the wayside. The pleasure produced by the sight and sound of the rain under this retreat often comes more delightfully to our memory than all the sunshiny adventures of the day. But in order to be affected in the most agreeable manner by the sound of rain, it is necessary to be in company with those whom we love, or to feel an assurance that the objects of our care are within doors, and to be ignorant of any person's exposure to its violence.

During a thunder-storm the thunder is in many cases too terrific to allow us to feel a tranquil enjoyment of the occasion. There is no sound in Nature that is so pleasantly modified by distance. Some minutes before the thunder-storm there is a perfect stillness of the atmosphere which is fearfully ominous of the approaching tempest. It follows the first enshrouding of daylight in the clouds which are slowly gathering over our heads, as they come up from the western horizon. It is at such times that the sullen moan of the thunder, far down as it were below the belt of the hemisphere, is peculiarly solemn and impressive, and more productive of the emotion of sublimity than when the crash is heard directly over our heads. To be witness of a storm is pleasant when we are, and believe others to be, in a place of safety. Then do we listen with intense delight to the voice of winds and waters as they contend with the Demon of the storm, and the awful warring of the elements excites the most sublime sensations, unalloyed with any painful anxiety for the safety of a fellow-being.

Thunder is heard with different emotions when it proceeds from clouds which are moving towards us and when from those already settled down in the east, after the storm is past. The consciousness that the one indicates a rising storm renders forcibly suggestive the perils we are soon to encounter and increases our anxiety. When we are in the midst of the storm we feel the emotion of terror rather than that of sublimity. An uncomfortable amount of anxiety destroys that tranquillity of mind which is necessary for the full enjoyment of the sublime as well as the beautiful scenes of Naure.

It is pleasant after the terrors of the storm have ceased, when the blue sky in the west begins to appear in dim streaks through the misty and luminous atmosphere, to watch the lightnings from a window, as they play down the dark clouds in the eastern horizon, and to listen to the rumblings of the thunder as it begins loudly overhead, then dies away almost like the roaring of waves in a distant part of the heavens. Then do we contemplate the spectacle with a grateful sense of relief from the fears that lately agitated the mind, and surrender our souls to all the influences naturally awakened by a mingled scene of beauty and grandeur.

The emotion of sublimity is more powerfully excited by any circumstances that add mystery to a scene or to the sounds we may be contemplating. Hence any unknown sound that resembles that of an earthquake impresses the mind at once with a feeling of awe, however insignificant its origin. The booming of a cannon over a distance that renders its identity uncertain causes in the hearers a breathless attention, as to something ominous of danger.

FEBRUARY.

When we consider the general sameness of winter's aspects, we need not marvel that among the works of landscape-painters there are but few pictures of winter. These few have generally represented some domestic scene, — a cottage with its roof covered with snow; cattle standing in a warm shelter in the barnyard; poultry huddled in a sunny corner; and children hastening toward their homes. Among the designs of Thomas Bewick there is only one winter scene, and this has served as the original from which all later ones have been copied or imitated. It represents a traveller with a pack on his shoulders, trudging over a trackless region of snow-covered ground, accompanied by his dog. He makes his way, not like a man who is enjoying his walk, but as one beset with dangers and thinking only of gaining his journey's end. The sun shines coldly upon him, and the wind causes him to bend to its blast. The naked trees frown upon him, his lengthened shadow seems like the ghost of Winter forever haunting his sight, and his dog looks up to him piteously and seemingly anxious to know his master's thoughts.

Whenever we ramble in winter we can readily understand why the naturalist, who studies individual objects, should find but few attractions in a winter's walk; but it is not so clear why the painter, whose principal purpose is to observe aspects, should be uninterested. If we are inclined to indulge in meditation, no other season is so favorable to it. In the agreeable monotony of a snow-scene, there is but little to divert attention from our thoughts. We can find enough to employ our observation; but there is less than at other seasons that forces itself upon our attention. We can leave ourselves at any time, to examine a remarkable object or to view a charming scene.

He must have an eye that is insensible to grandeur and a mind that is incapable of appreciating the sublimity of landscape who would say that Nature is destitute of charms in the month of February. It is true that the variegated surface of brown and white that characterizes a winter prospect, though it be here and there diversified with a knoll of evergreen-trees that lift their heads as it were in triumph above the snows, will not compare with the interminable verdure of summer or the magnificence of forest scenery in autumn; yet there is a quiet sublimity that pervades all Nature — hill, field, and flood — at this season, which almost reconciles one to the temporary absence of summer flowers and spicy gales.

I am no lover of cold weather, and feel more contented when the sultry heats of summer oblige me to seek the refreshing breezes beneath a willow-tree on the banks of the sea-shore, than when the cold blasts of winter drive me within doors or force me to mope in a sunny nook in the forest. But there are days in winter, when the wind is still and mild, which are attended with pleasant sensations seldom experienced even in the month of June. Whether the delightful influence of this serene weather arises from a physical cause, or whether it is the result of contrast with the cold that has kept us half imprisoned for many weeks, I cannot determine. But when I review the rural rambles of former years, my winter walks on these delightful days will always crowd most sweetly and vividly upon my memory.

In winter the mind possesses more sensibility to rural charms than during the seasons of vegetation and flowers. A long deprivation of any kind of pleasure increases our susceptibility and magnifies our capacity for enjoyment. Thus we may become indifferent to the warbling of birds in the summer, while we are forming a habit which, after the long silence of the wintry woods, shall cause the melodies of spring to yield us the greatest delight. After the confinement of winter we are keenly alive to agreeable impressions from all rural sights and sounds. Then does the sight of a green arbor in the woods or a green plat in a valley affect us as I can imagine a weary traveller to be affected on suddenly meeting an oasis in a desert. The melancholy that attends a ramble in the autumn has passed from us, and we now come forth, during the sleep of vegetation and in the general hush of animated things, with some of the gladness that inspires the mind when the little song-sparrow first sings his prelude to the general anthem of Nature. Some blessing comes from every sacrifice, and some recompense for every privation. Thus the darkness of night prepares us to welcome with gladness the dawn of a new morning. The charm of life springs from its vicissitudes, and we are capable of no new enjoyment until we have rested from pleasure.

When the earth is covered with snow that has grown hard enough to bear our footsteps without sinking into the drifts, I have often taken advantage of one of the serene days of winter to ramble in the woods. Every pleasant rural object I then behold affords me as much pleasure as I should derive in summer from all the charms of landscape united in one view. The snow lies in scattered parcels over the earth, that serves to variegate the scene and to render it more pleasing to the sight than the dull monotonous brown which the landscape wears at this season, when there is no snow.

Every sound I hear in the woods at such a time is music, though it be but the cowbell's chime, the stroke of the woodman's axe, or the crash of some tall tree just falling to the ground. Sometimes, during this period of calm sunshine, the squirrels will come forth from their retreats and in the echoing silence of the woods we may hear their rustling leap among the dry oak-leaves, their occasional chirrup, and the dropping of nuts from the lofty branches of the hickory. There is music in all the echoes that break the stillness of the hour; in the cawing of crows, the scream of jays, or the quick hammering of the woodpecker upon the hollow trunk of some ancient standard of the forest.

The mild serenity of the weather, the fresh odors that arise from thawing vegetation, the beautiful haze that surrounds the horizon, reflecting all the colors of the rainbow, the lively chattering of poultry in the farm-yards, the bleating of flocks and the lowing of kine, an occasional concert of crows in the neighboring wood, the checkered landscape of snow-drifts rising out of the brown earth and gleaming in the sunshine, and the soft hazy light that glows from distant hills and spires, — all these rural sights and sounds affect us with a pleasure not surpassed by that which is felt at any time or season. Now and then, amidst all this harmonious medley, as if to remind us of the coming delights of spring, a solitary song-sparrow, prematurely arrived from the south, will tune his little throat and sing from some leafless shrub his first salutation of reviving Nature.

Among the attractions of winter scenery I must not omit the frostwork upon the windows, which has been so often used by poets to emblemize the hopes of youth. All vegetation in summer presents not a greater variety of forms than we may behold in these beautiful configurations. The mornings which are most remarkable for this curious pencil-work are such as follow a very cold night after mild and thawing weather on the preceding day. Nothing in the world seems so much like the effects of enchantment. The pictures made by the frost upon our window-panes are a part of the domestic scenery of winter; but their origin and progress form a curious study. It is remarkable that this deposit of frost resembles in structure and development the formation of clouds in clear weather in the upper region of the heavens. The clouds usually display more beauty of form in winter and in very dry weather, because the arid state of the atmosphere is favorable to their delicate organization. Hence the most beautiful clouds are those which are highest above the earth's surface, where the air contains but very little moisture. The same principle affects the formation of window-frost. The air of the room when only slightly charged with vapor projects the most delicate and beautiful figures on the windows.

The first deposit on the window-glass, when the weather is very cold and the air of the room moist, is a thin iridescent film resembling that produced by oil spread upon the surface of still water. This iridescence vanishes at the moment when the film begins to change into a crystallized surface. Immediately there appears in the place of it a collection of little *flocculi*, — a sort of constellation of minute snow-flakes, without any formal arrangement. These, as they increase from the moisture of the room, slowly assume a feathery organization, with more or less geometrical beauty, according as the deposit is made from air that is lightly or heavily charged with dampness. The less the moisture in the air of the room, if there be a sufficient quantity, and the colder the air outside if the inner air be not much above freezing-point, the finer and more beautiful are these configurations. Hence the windows of a sleeping-room, if not occupied by more than two or three persons, are more delicately frosted on a cold morning than those of a cooking-room where the moisture is precipitated so rapidly upon them as to mar their arrangement.

There is no season or month without its peculiar beauties. They are distilled like dew from heaven, and cover all places. They are scattered over the greensward in spring and summer, upon the forest in autumn, and in winter they are spread over the earth with the whiteness of snow and precipitated in frost upon the trees and upon our window-panes. At all times and seasons may we look upon these wonders and beauties that attract our sight in the least as well as the greatest operations of the Invisible Artist.

BIRDS OF THE FARM AND THE FARM-YARD.

It is not easy to explain why certain species of birds and other animals are susceptible of domestication, while others resist all efforts to inure them to artificial habits. The mystery is increased when we consider that individuals of a species which cannot be domesticated may, when reared in a cage, be made as tame as the tamest of our domestic birds. There are certain families of which several species have been domesticated. This is true of the Gallinaceous tribe and of the Anseres. Of the former are the Cock, the Turkey, the Pintado, the Peacock. Of the Anseres, there are two or three species of Goose and several species of Duck. Several of the Pigeon tribe may be domesticated. The Rook and the House Sparrow of England may also be regarded as in a state of at least partial domestication. The species among our birds that comes nearest the Rook in its habits is the Purple Grackle. That, as population thickens, the Grackles will assume more and more of the habits of a domestic bird, seems not improbable, especially if they should be protected for their valuable services to agriculture.

THE HOUSE SPARROW.

I am not entirely free from suspicions that by naturalizing the House Sparrow in this country, we have introduced a pest. It has always been regarded in Europe as a mischievous bird, but is tolerated because, like all the

Sparrow family, through granivorous for the most part, it destroys great quantities of grubs and insects during its breeding-season, which continues several months. Other circumstances that render the bird valuable are its domesticated habits, its permanent residence, and its proneness to live and multiply in the city as well as the country. The little Hair Bird, which is far more interesting and musical, is not a permanent resident, and cannot, from its habit of breeding in trees, become inured to the city. Perhaps, therefore, it need not be feared that the multiplication of the House Sparrows will diminish the number of our native birds. But I cannot, while dwelling on this subject, avoid the reflection that since our people are resolutely bent on the destruction of our native birds, it may be fortunate that there exists a foreign species of such a character that, like the white-weed and the witch-grass, after being once introduced, they cannot by any possible human efforts be extirpated. When all our native species are gone, we may be happy to hear the unmusical chatter of the House Sparrows, and gladly watch them and protect them, as we should, if all the human race had perished but our single self, welcome the society of orang-otangs.

I am pleased to learn that Dr. Brewer does not fear that their introduction will cause any evil to our native birds. If I were entirely satisfied of the correctness of his opinion, I should say welcome to the little intruders. They are at least valuable by affording amusement to children who are confined to cities, and who may watch and feed them where, if they were absent, but few other birds would be seen. But I will leave the House Sparrow to treat of a far more interesting family of birds, the common Domestic Pigeon.

THE DOVE.

It is a matter of curiosity among naturalists that Doves and Pigeons, which are active and powerful on the wing beyond any known species, should have submitted so readily to domestication. Their power of wing and consequent capacity of providing food for themselves at great distances from their habitations must render them quite independent of any necessity of resorting to man's protection, like the gallinaceous birds. Yet they have probably been domesticated, like the common fowl, from immemorial time. The Dove is a bird which has been sacred in all ages as an emblem of constancy, while hardly a gallinaceous bird could be named that does not in its moral habits represent the political theory of free love. Ornithologists have lately removed the Dove into a separate family, reclassing it as distinct from all other birds. Doves are, in a wild state, very powerful on the wing; but, having small feet and legs, they are awkward and feeble walkers. The Goose is said to fly to a greater height than any other bird; but none can equal wild Pigeons in swiftness. This power of flight is of great service to them when foraging; for they can have a roost in Virginia and sally forth in any direction fifty miles to obtain a breakfast, and return sooner than the steam-cars could perform the journey in one direction.

The Dove, — the most amiable of birds, consecrated to some of the kindest virtues of the human soul, dedicated in ancient times to Venus, whose chariot was drawn by two Doves, — like a sweet maiden who neither flaunts nor glitters, but gains admiration solely by her innocence and her beauty, is very properly considered the symbol of purity and holiness. Holy Spirit and Heavenly Dove are, in the poetry of Christianity, synonymous expressions. The Dove, in Biblical Fable, that was sent out by Noah to determine the condition of the earth after this great captain and his family had become weary of navigating the Ark, brought back the olive-branch, which, like its feathered bearer, has ever since been regarded as the emblem of peace.

The Dove is more completely domesticated than the Quail could be under any circumstances. But it is almost exclusively granivorous, and is not so useful a bird as the Quail, flocks of which, if protected by providing them food and shelter, would frequent our orchards, and rid the trees entirely of the canker-worms by picking up the insects that generate them before they have climbed the tree. Mr. George W. Rice of West Newton has for several years past kept his apple-trees free from canker-worms by means of early chickens. He binds a raw cotton band round the tree very near the ground. Before the insects have time to creep over this obstacle, they are caught by the hens and chickens, so that not more than one in a hundred escapes.

Doves of all species seem to be very similar in their manners. Almost the only notes they utter are a gentle cooing, and if you scare one it does not scream, like other birds, but makes only a low moaning. Hence arose the reputation of the Dove for gentleness. Yet it is not without spirit or courage. When a boy I had a flock of thirty pigeons, all white. I watched them so attentively that I learned all their peculiar habits, the constancy of the mated female, the gallantry of all males toward unmated females, and the courage with which both sexes would defend their place and nest. I could distinguish each one of the flock from all the rest, and had a name for each. They were all black-eyed but one, and this one had a slight tinge of lilac upon its white feathers, and its eyes were light gray. The common slate-colored Pigeon has red eyes.

THE TURTLE-DOVE.

The first wild bird I captured and tamed in my boyhood was taken from the nest of a Carolina Turtle-Dove. The nest was placed upon the horizontal branches of a small white pine about fifteen feet from the ground. It was made of slender twigs put together as carelessly as if they had fallen from some branches above, and were levelled, but not hollowed, by the parent birds. The nest contained a single white egg, more roundish in its shape than that of the common tame Pigeon. I took the young bird from the nest when it was nearly ready to fly. I fed it exclusively upon farinaceous food, and was successful in rearing it. It grew very tame, and behaved like the young of a domesticated Dove. It often flew away in quest of food and regularly returned, and was so docile as to sit upon my hand. I exchanged the bird, to gratify one of my schoolmates, for a volume of Peter Pindar's works, which I read over and over again with great delight, and a volume of President Monroe's Tour, which I used for kindling-paper.

After I had taken the bird from the nest I heard for more than a week the almost uninterrupted cooing or moaning of the parents, or one of them, upon an old white oak that stood in a field near my boarding-house, which was almost surrounded by woods. This oak was about a quarter of a mile from the nest, and it seemed as if the old birds had in some way or other a suspicion of the fact that the young one had been removed in this direction from the nest. To listen to the "mourning Dove" was a romantic incident that gave me so much satisfaction that it entirely absorbed all the sympathy I was disposed to feel for the bereaved parents. The young Dove was shot soon after I parted with it by one of the pioneers of Christian civilization, a Divinity Student.

Turtle-Doves are now rarely seen in New England, but they are common in other States. In this centre of enlightenment there is plenty of cant about mercy to birds and other creatures; there are whole encyclopædias of rhymes written about the "beautiful and innocent birds." But the rhymes and the cant go hand in hand with the snare, the gun, and strychnine; as the Bible and missionaries sail lovingly together with rum and gunpowder, to Africa and other regions of moral darkness, sent onward by the same persons and the same funds. There may be some desire in many hearts for the preservation of our birds; but it is with our sentimentalists as with our politicians, sentiment must give way to peas and strawberries as principle must give way to party and personal ambition. It is a remarkable fact that the possession of a single cherry-tree or one bed of strawberries will turn the most lachrymatory sentimentalist into a rabid exterminator of the feathered race.

THE COCK.

I should be guilty of a great omission, if in my descriptions of interesting birds I were to say nothing of the common Cock, the true Bird of Morn in every country; the monitor who never fails to give the inmates of the house notice of the dawn of day. So intimately is this bird allied with the morning, that the dawn is always designated as the hour of cock-crowing. If he should cease hereafter faithfully to announce the earliest approach of day, we should look upon him as one who had lost the most remarkable trait in his character. But, like other birds that sing by night, he is often deceived by the light of the moon, when it rises past midnight, mistaking its beams for the promise of dawn.

The Cock is a bird of the East, and is by nature addicted to Eastern customs and habits. He is furnished with spurs with which he is expected to fight for the possession of as many females as he can procure by slaying his rivals. He knows no such feeling as an exclusive attachment to a single mate. He is a bird neither of sentiment nor principle. His crowing is but sound of triumph and exultation which is designed to notify all his brood of wives of his presence and of his power to defend them, and his defiance to other males who should venture to claim any one of the numerous members of his harem. His example has always been copied by the kings and sultans of the East. There is only this difference, — that the Cock obtains by his prowess what the sultan obtains by wealth and political authority, aided and countenanced by the deity whom he worships. But if Solomon was like Chanticleer in his customs, we might apply to him a quotation from the New Testament: "That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

The variety of plumage which is displayed by this bird in his domesticated state surpasses that of any known species. It is remarkable, however, that he has very few pure colors. He has no pure yellow, nor blue, nor crimson, nor scarlet, nor vermilion. But there is a brilliancy about these neutralized colors and there are fine contrasts in their arrangement giving splendor to certain varieties of this bird that cannot be surpassed. There are some which are pure white and others pure black. In these varieties the male and female differ but slightly in color. In other varieties, if the female is brown, the male is red; if the female is black, with neck-feathers grayish striped, the male is black, with neck and saddle feathers of a bright buff color. If the female is all gray, the male is gray, with neck and saddle white and tail black. Several of these contrasts are very beautiful. The long silken feathers of the neck and saddle distinguish the Cock from almost every other bird save the Pheasant. The Peacock, the Turkey, and the Guinea-Fowl are destitute of these marks.

THE TURKEY.

The Turkey is not so interesting a bird as the Cock. He is neither so lively nor so courageous. His gobbling is not so musical as the crowing of the Cock, nor is it in any respect a sentinel sound. He resembles the Peacock in many ways, but does not equal him in beauty. But the wild Turkey is said to be in all respects more beautiful than the tame one. There was formerly some controversy respecting the American origin of this bird. Beside the whimsical Daines Barrington, many eminent naturalists supposed Africa to be its native country. Buffon, however, eloquently supported its claims to be considered an American bird. C. L. Buonaparte says, the first Turkey that garnished a feast in France was served up at the wedding banquet of Charles the Ninth in the year 1570. This was also the date of the general introduction of the Turkey into Europe as a domestic bird.

Dr. Franklin wrote a characteristic piece of humor on the substitution of the Turkey for the Bald Eagle as the emblematic representative of our country. The Bald Eagle he considers a bird of bad moral character, who gets his living by dishonest means. Like a robber he watches the Fish Hawk, and when he has caught a fish, pounces upon him and takes it away from him. Withal, he is a rank coward, and permits himself to be driven out of the district by the little Kingbird. He confesses, therefore, that he is not displeased that the figure is not recognized as a Bald Eagle, but looks more like a Turkey. The Turkey is a more respectable bird, and a true native of America. He is also, though a little vain and silly (and, as the Doctor expresses it, "not the worse emblem on that account"), a bird of courage, and would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British Guards who should invade his grounds with a red coat on.

Wild Turkeys were formerly not uncommon in the woods of New England. If any still remain they will not long escape the besom of civilization and progress. The Turkey will vanish with the Turtle-Dove and the Quail, and go where arithmetic and trigonometry have not yet mapped out the wilderness into auction-lots.

THE GOOSE.

The Goose is truly a pastoral bird. Though it uses animal food, it lives more upon grain and by grazing, like cattle and sheep. It is not a sea fowl. It devours some insects, but does not take fishes, and resorts to the water chiefly at night, where it retires to rest, for security. It is the pastoral habit of the Goose that renders it so fit a subject for domestication. On the same account it is a better walker than the Duck, that passes the greater part of its time in the water, feeding upon the aquatic vegetables that grow in the shallows and upon such insects as are found among them. The Goose, notwithstanding the general habit among us of using its name as the superlative of folly, is an intelligent bird. The proverb "silly as a Goose" would be more correctly applied to a Hen or a Turkey.

The Goose has no special beauty of plumage. Its colors seldom vary from white and black and gray. The wild Goose of America greatly surpasses the common domesticated species in beauty, having some fine shades of green and purple on the black feathers of its long swan-like neck. Charles Waterton says of this species, which has been very generally domesticated in Great Britain: "There can be nothing more enlivening to rural solitude than the trumpet-sounding notes of the Canada Goose. They may be heard at most hours of the day and during the night. But spring is the time when these birds are most vociferous. Then it is that they are on the wing, moving in aerial circles round the mansion; now rising aloft, now dropping into the water, with such notes of apparent joy and revelling as cannot fail to attract the attention of those who feel an interest in the wildest scenery."

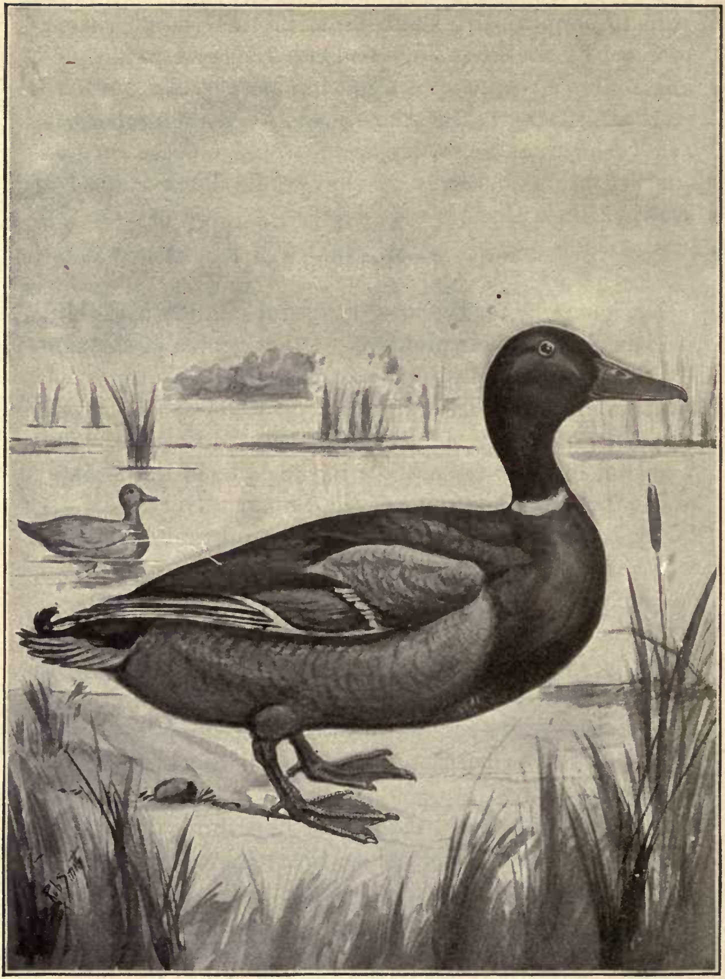
Wild Geese and other birds of the same family assemble, not in myriads, like Pigeons and Blackbirds, but in such limited flocks as admit of organization and geometric arrangement. Geese sometimes fly in a straight line; but more frequently make a triangular figure, that permits each one in the rear to see its leader. Some naturalists say that Geese fly to a greater height than any other bird; others say they are surpassed by Herons. They are often, however, at so great height that they may be heard, when nothing more of them than a black line can be seen. Before they alight upon the ground they form a straight line, probably without any purpose but from the habit of arranging themselves in a single rank and file when flying. Having taken their rest for a few hours, the sentinel gives the signal note, when they all rise again, form the same triangular group, and pursue their mysterious journey to a southern clime.

Naturalists are not agreed respecting the character of the leader of these flocks. Some believe that an old gander who has previously made the journey takes the lead. Others assert that each one of the flock takes his turn in being leader. It seems to me highly probable that neither of these assumptions is correct; but on the other hand, that the leadership is a matter of chance, except that the most powerful individuals would usually happen to place themselves at the head of the flock, being naturally the most active and vigorous, the first to rise from the ground and the swiftest to gain the foremost position. It is absurd to suppose that these birds in their migrations are directed by the knowledge and experience of a few older ones. Urged by a powerful impulse, if the old birds were all destroyed, the young flock, when the proper time arrived for their migratory flight, would proceed on their journey as instinctively as they would konk instead of crowing like a Cock.

THE DUCK.

Ducks are by far the most beautiful of all aquatic birds in the colors of their plumage. Other genera of this family seldom show any hues except a various mixture of white and gray. The plumage of several species of the Duck is of many colors and finely variegated. This beautiful lustre is remarkable in the drake of the Mallard, of the Teal, and above all of the Summer Duck. Of the latter, both male and female are beautiful, and the species was named by Linnæus, on account of its beauty, *sponsa,* a bride. Its pendent crest of green and purple hanging from the back of its head; its neck of purple-crimson, changing in front to a glossy brown, speckled with white; its wings and tail of metallic green, changeable into blue and crimson,— its endless varieties, indeed, of changeable hues cause it to surpass in beauty all the birds of our woods and waters.

It is not often that we have an opportunity of watching for any considerable time the manœuvres of wild Geese or wild Ducks upon the water. We must observe the motions of the domesticated birds to learn those of the wild ones, making allowance for less dexterity, as the consequence of domestication. The flight and habits of the Duck are not less interesting or picturesque than those of the Goose. Their whistling flocks that pass frequently over our heads at different seasons always



DUCK

command our attention. Ducks live the greater part of the time upon the water, feeding upon the plants that grow around their edges and borders. Hence they prefer small ponds and inlets of the sea to the bay or harbor. But, like almost all other species of birds, the Duck and the Teal are rarely seen except in the remote lakes of the forest. These wild birds are allowed no peace and no security. I cannot see what is to prevent their utter extirpation from the American continent.

The Black Duck seems more nearly allied to the Mallard than to any American species. It has been repeatedly domesticated, and mixes with the Mallard, and the mixed offspring have none of the marks and qualities of hybrids. The drake of this species has not the beauty of the Mallard drake. Flocks of them are common in the autumn in some of our solitary inlets or near our harbors; and they formerly reared their young in Massachusetts. They have been driven away by gunners, and they now breed only in the northern parts of New England, especially near the lakes of Maine. Samuels found the nest of one on a low stump, that overhung a small spring on the side of a hill, a mile from any water. He says these nests are abundant all round Lake Umbagog. When the fresh ponds are frozen, the Ducks resort to the salt water, and are often seen, in flocks of considerable size, in our harbors and salt-water creeks in winter.

THE SWAN.

If the Duck is the most beautifully arrayed of all aquatic birds, the Swan is certainly the most graceful and attractive when sailing upon the water. The Swan resembles the Duck more than the Goose in its feeding habits. It does not graze like the Goose, but takes its food from beneath the water, often probing to the bottom of shallow waters by means of its long neck, which seems designed for this purpose. Wild Swans associate in small flocks, separating in pairs during the breeding-season, and rising in large companies when the approach of winter warns them to seek a more genial clime. When they finally take their migrating flight, they divide themselves again into small flocks. and shape their course after the manner of Wild Geese.

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